THE ULTIMATE MUSIC GUIDE

TALKING HEADS

THE HEAT GOES ON

TALKING HEADS

THEIR FULL, TRUE STORY

DAVID BYRNE SOLO | TOM TOM CLUB | THE SINGLES | THE '02 REUNION

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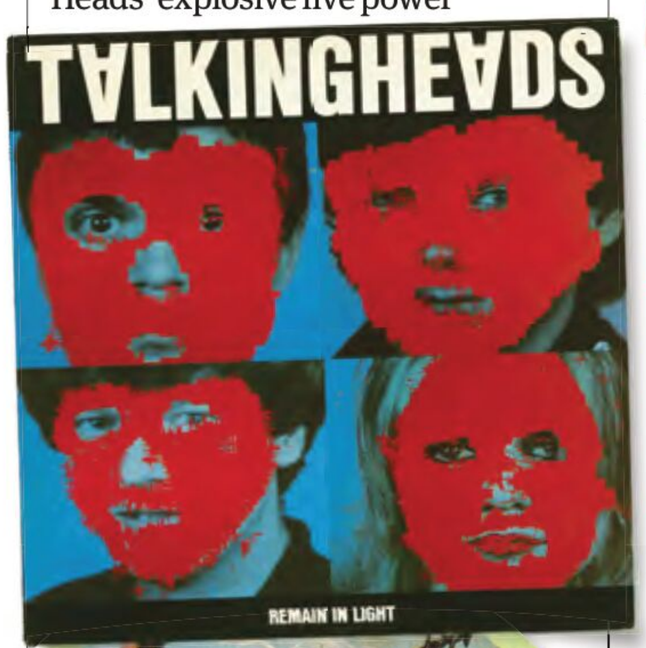
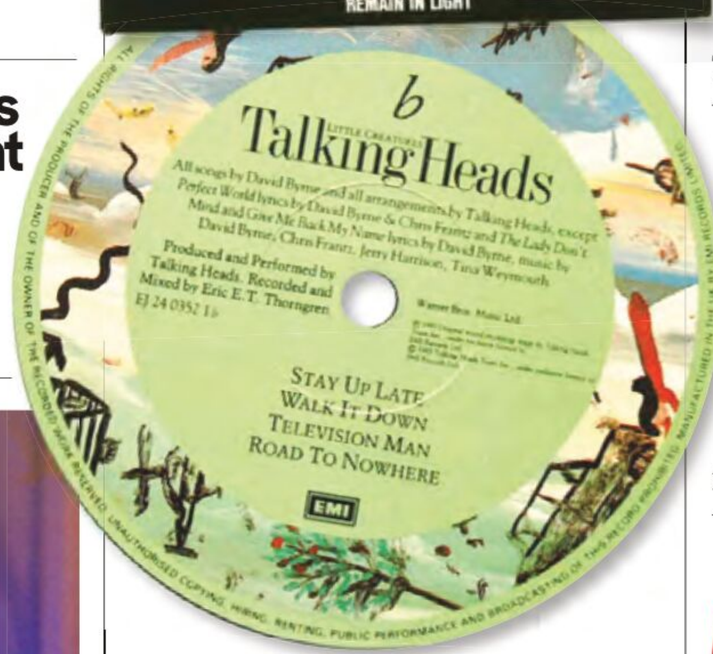
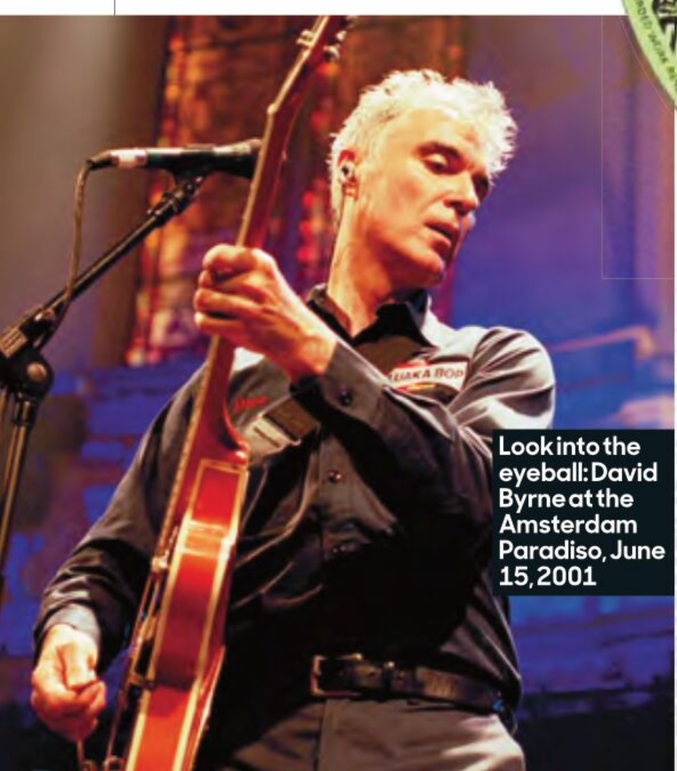
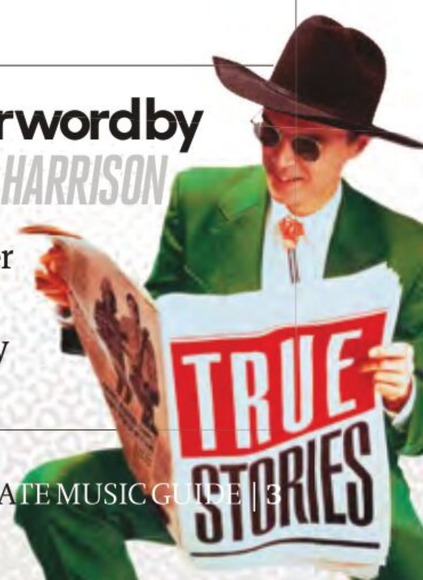
Power of four: Talking Heads in 1977 – (l-r) Chris Frantz, Jerry Harrison, David Byrne, Tina Weymouth






Look into the eyeball: David Byrne at the Amsterdam Paradiso, June 15, 2001



PETER PAKVIS/REDFERNS, DEBORAH FEINGOLD/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES, TCD/PROD.DB/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

MANY THANKS TO MATTHEW RANKIN AT NONESUCH RECORDS

"PEOPLE HAD TO SEE THIS FREAK SHOW FOR THEMSELVES…"

DAVID BYRNE writes exclusively for us about the origins of Talking Heads, on luck and the music press — and his abiding motivations. "The chance to be disruptive artistically and do something possibly revolutionary was an irresistible lure…"

IT'S FLATTERING to be given the *Ultimate Music Guide* treatment. I have no idea what a backwards view of my professional life – or part of it at least – will reveal, so I can't comment on whether my work and that of Talking Heads might appear to me to be treated unfairly or (more likely, I suspect) treated as the work of critics' darlings – except when it was felt we or I strayed from the path of righteousness. I also anticipate that there were some cringeworthy moments, maybe some I hadn't noticed before. Yikes.

A few thoughts occur to me in regard to this issue. How much luck had to do with it and the role of music-writing in shaping both an audience and an artist's perception of what they hear and do.

First off, luck.

Though I'd been performing on and off since high school, the move to New York and an eventual audition at CBGB's and much that came after was, in retrospect, a result of a number of factors, luck being one of them.

I seem to recall my friends and future bandmates in Providence, Rhode Island, becoming aware of a New York scene that pre-dated CBGB's, via *Creem* magazine and maybe some other music mags. We'd read about the NY Dolls, the Modern Lovers, Jayne County and the Dictators who performed at the Mercer Arts Center. This all seemed incredibly cool and edgy – a combo of drag, rock'n'roll and revolutionary contemporary art that was emerging out of the coldwater lofts of SoHo. NY was obviously where it was happening.

This NY scene that we saw from afar was small – none of these musicians or artists were nationally known or were doing well financially. What drew us there was certainly not money, and if it was fame it was fame on a very small scale. But fame and respect from folks you thought were cool was high currency – and the chance to be disruptive artistically and do something possibly revolutionary was an irresistible lure. So this move to NY was not luck, it was intentional. But speaking for myself, as much as I was drawn to the music scene, my ambition at the

JODY ROGAC

David Byrne, 2017: "I knew then not having an initial huge success was a blessing in a way"

time was not to be a pop star but rather to be a conceptual artist who showed in galleries where other exciting and challenging work was being offered to a baffled public. I had scant hopes of having a successful career in music – as I said, I'd played solo and with others before, and loved it, but always felt there were more talented, more trained and more seriously ambitious musicians out there and I had zero chance in a competition with them. "Don't even think about it," was my attitude, yet I continued to write some songs and doodle about on a guitar. Maybe a part of me was secretly ambitious despite my rational self saying, "Don't kid yourself."

The Spanish filmmaker Fernando Trueba maintains that often directors do their best work when they aren't being self-consciously ambitious. When they don't think they're making a masterpiece, that's when they actually do make their best work. Caring too much is a liability, in his opinion. I wonder if that's what happened here. The music was an avocation, but lots of fun. I was writing art manifestos, writing songs and sometimes going with friends to a dive bar that was less than a block away. Bands were starting to play there. This was where luck came in. We'd saunter over, pay the minimal cover charge, drink cheap beer and hear Television, Patti Smith, the Ramones – those would be the ones you've heard of. There were folk acts and progressive rock as well. Around the corner at Club 82 there were the more theatrical acts like the Dictators and Jayne County. My former schoolmates and I shared a loft and Chris and I had been in an art school band together, and as I recall he suggested, "Why don't we work up some of those songs and try out at this club?"

We were *so* lucky. We passed the audition – the bar could not have been that high – but we did have some real songs. Word was getting out about this place and the bands and artists who were making a scene there. The audiences were still minuscule, but the press began to check us all out, and word began to spread. If you're reading this, you've heard this part of the story. Even those artists I dreamed of joining in the conceptual art revolution would show up – Vito Acconci, Dennis Oppenheim, Joseph Kosuth. We were truly in the right place at the right time.

I have to believe we (and our contemporaries) were doing something innovative and that it wasn't *all* just luck. Right place, right time for sure though. Time would tell; I'd read too many rock-star bios to believe that our initial good luck would inevitably last forever.

The press.

Just as my friends and I had heard about some of these bands in *Creem* (Lenny Kaye, Patti Smith's guitarist, was a writer), now they and others were writing about us. They called us conservative, they said my eyes looked like ping-pong balls, that my voice was little more than a yelp.

Somehow this all worked in our favour – people had to see this freak show for themselves.

When you're the new thing, everyone is fairly supportive – we mostly got good reviews even if the audiences outside New York were still modest. We allowed our base to build slowly – the longer it takes to go up, the longer it takes to fall down, someone said. Not having larger and speedier success meant we could learn as we went. We didn't have the pressure of keeping up an initial success. We had the luxury to experiment, to push out in new directions. Our collaborator Brian Eno helped and encouraged us to do this.

I knew then not having an initial huge success was a blessing in a way – maybe another kind of luck. It gave us wiggle room. As I recall – and my memory could be faulty – we continued to be well received. Our biggest success in this period was the song "Once In A Lifetime". It was, as I recall, due to another bit of lucky timing. MTV had just started and bars and music clubs were playing it non-stop – the rest of us didn't have cable TV. Working with Toni Basil, I did a video for the song – paying for it out of my own pocket as I didn't imagine a record company would trust me to do this.

"WE HAD THE LUXURY TO EXPERIMENT, TO PUSH OUT IN NEW DIRECTIONS. BRIAN ENO HELPED AND ENCOURAGED US TO DO THIS"

MTV played the shit out of it, which was lucky because rock radio pronounced the song "too funky" and R&B radio loved the groove but it was just too weird. Eventually radio came around, but it was MTV that broke that song, and songs by other acts who jumped at that opportunity.

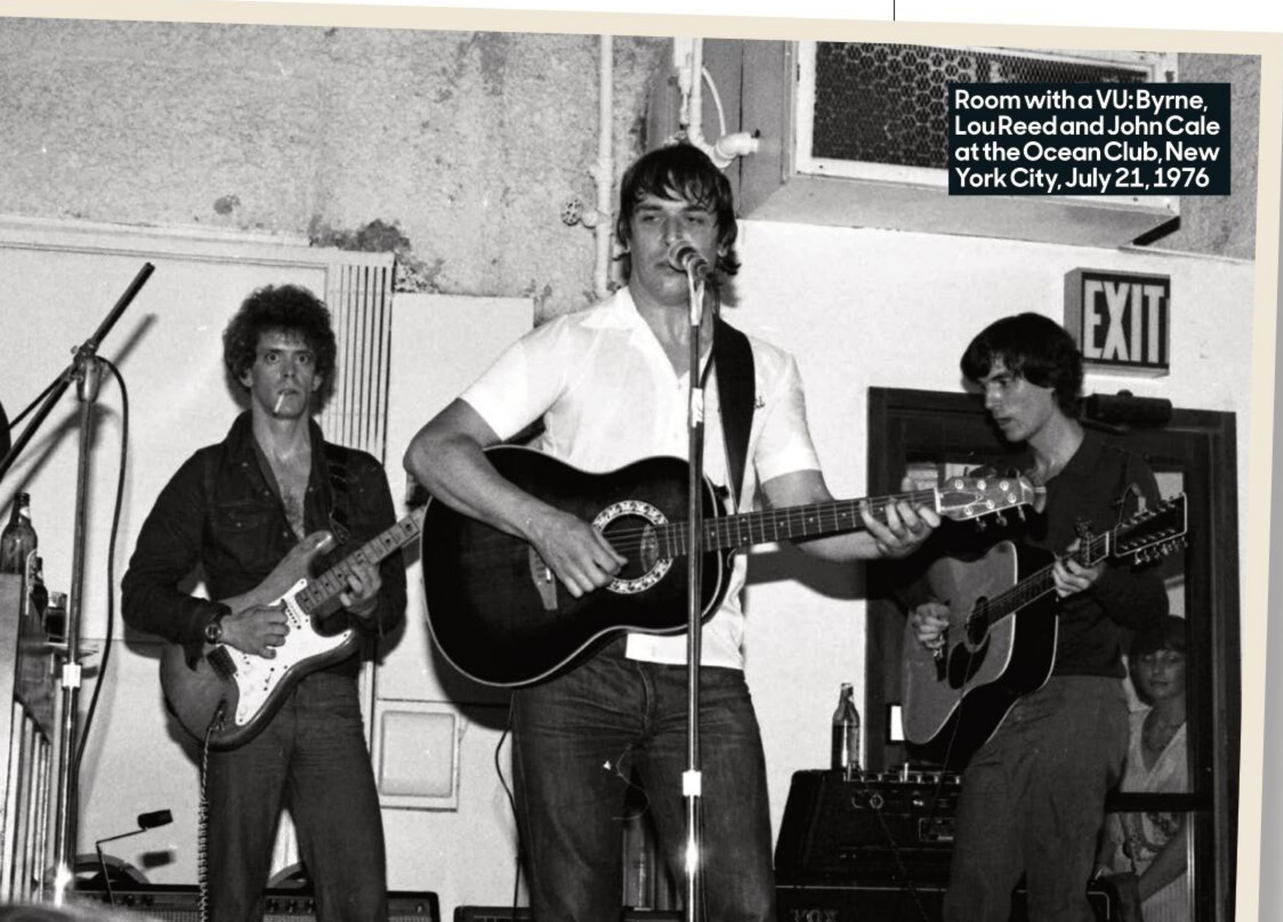
I recall getting some not entirely positive press around that time. Eno and I released a record that combined found voices with funky beats and moody tracks, and a *New York Times* writer accused us of "cultural imperialism". Other members of the press picked up on this and it became a recurring theme for a while. I realised the press seems nice when they're all supporting you, but they can turn. It hurt. But when I heard Larry Levan play a track from *...Bush Of Ghosts* at Paradise Garage I realised word was getting out despite the *NY Times* (I've since made up with that writer; we actually love a lot of the same music). The music press actually had some influence in those days. Besides word of mouth, mixtapes from friends and the radio, that was a way to find out about music. The internet was years in the future and writers like Lester Bangs, Greg Tate and Nick Kent made music writing into a kind of literature. They and some others helped us see music as a cultural phenomenon – to sense the inferences and resonance of music. Before *Rolling Stone* and *Creem* in the late '60s, no-one took pop music seriously – it was a product. But suddenly everyone became self-aware, for better or worse.

MY next bit of schooling regarding the varieties of media opinion came when I did a film called *True Stories* – an arty musical comedy about Texas, though not just about Texas, of course. Coastal elites insisted I was making fun of Texans, and that everything I did was ironic. It's true that some of what I'd done in the past had some serious irony attached, but in this case it wasn't meant that way. Texans loved the film – they loved seeing their culture, quirks, inventiveness and eccentricities appreciated by an outsider. It was certainly different from the cliched view of the South and West you saw in most movies. Europeans and European press liked the film as well. I wanted to think they understood it more – but maybe they secretly had a superior attitude towards Texans too...But maybe there was more love there as well. Witnessing this wildly different take on the film, I realised that the press is not a monolith. Some places and people can like what you do and others not so much.

This was brought home in a big way when I did my first solo tour with a massive Latin band. Perversely, I didn't play the hits – we artists sometimes do this to ourselves. I wanted to announce I was going somewhere new, I was going to jettison the past. The US press especially was sceptical. US audiences turned out, but soon began to abandon me – letting me go my own indulgent way. But in Latin America it was well received! Before going there on tour, I thought this might be "bringing coals to Newcastle", but for my generation of fans there it was seen as an act of openness by a fan – which is what was intended.

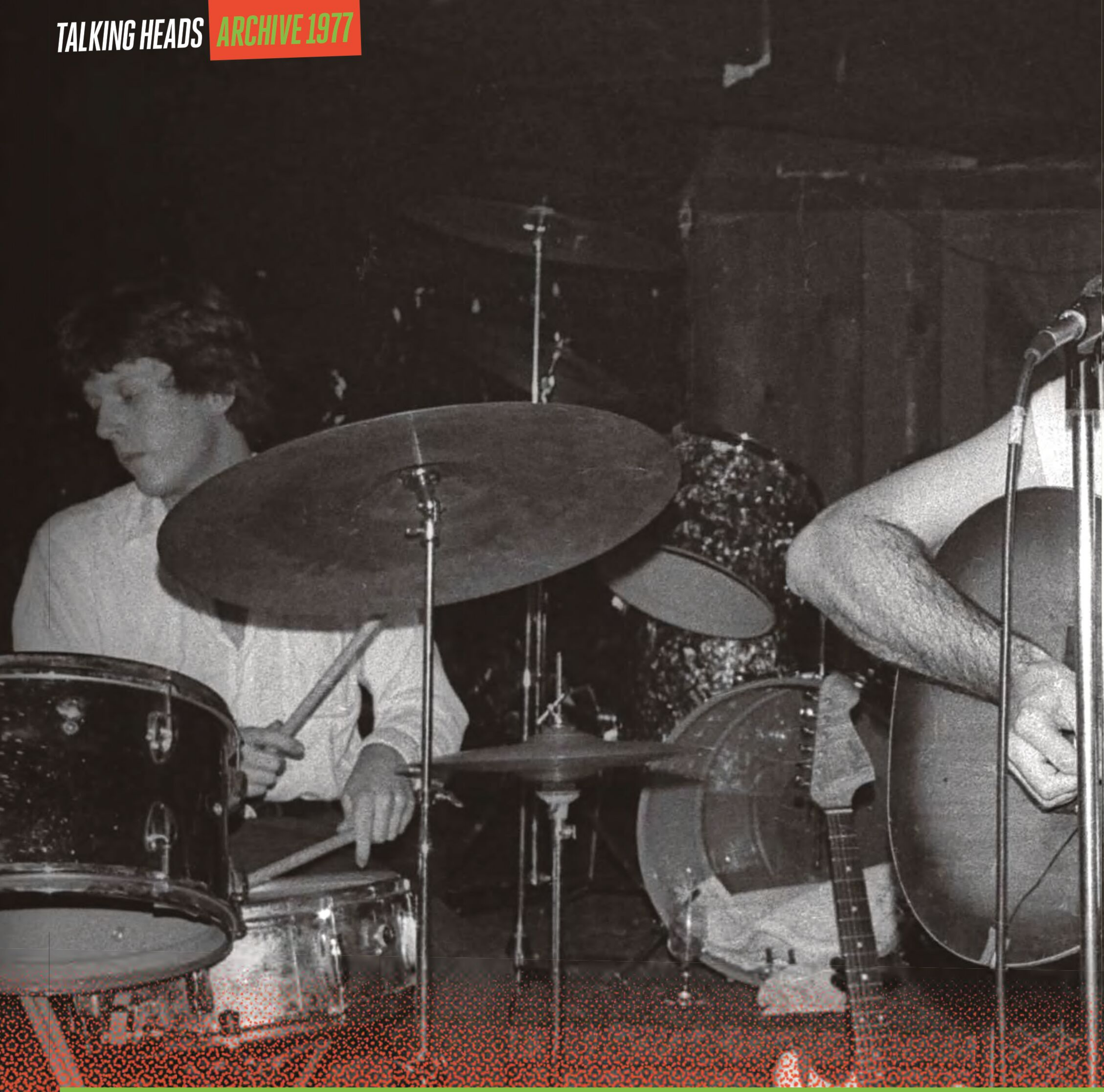
So, yes, you can't always please everyone all the time. As time went on I realised there would be ups and downs, good luck and not so good luck; not everything I did would be brilliant, but the next one would for sure be genius. ▲

David Byrne, October 2020

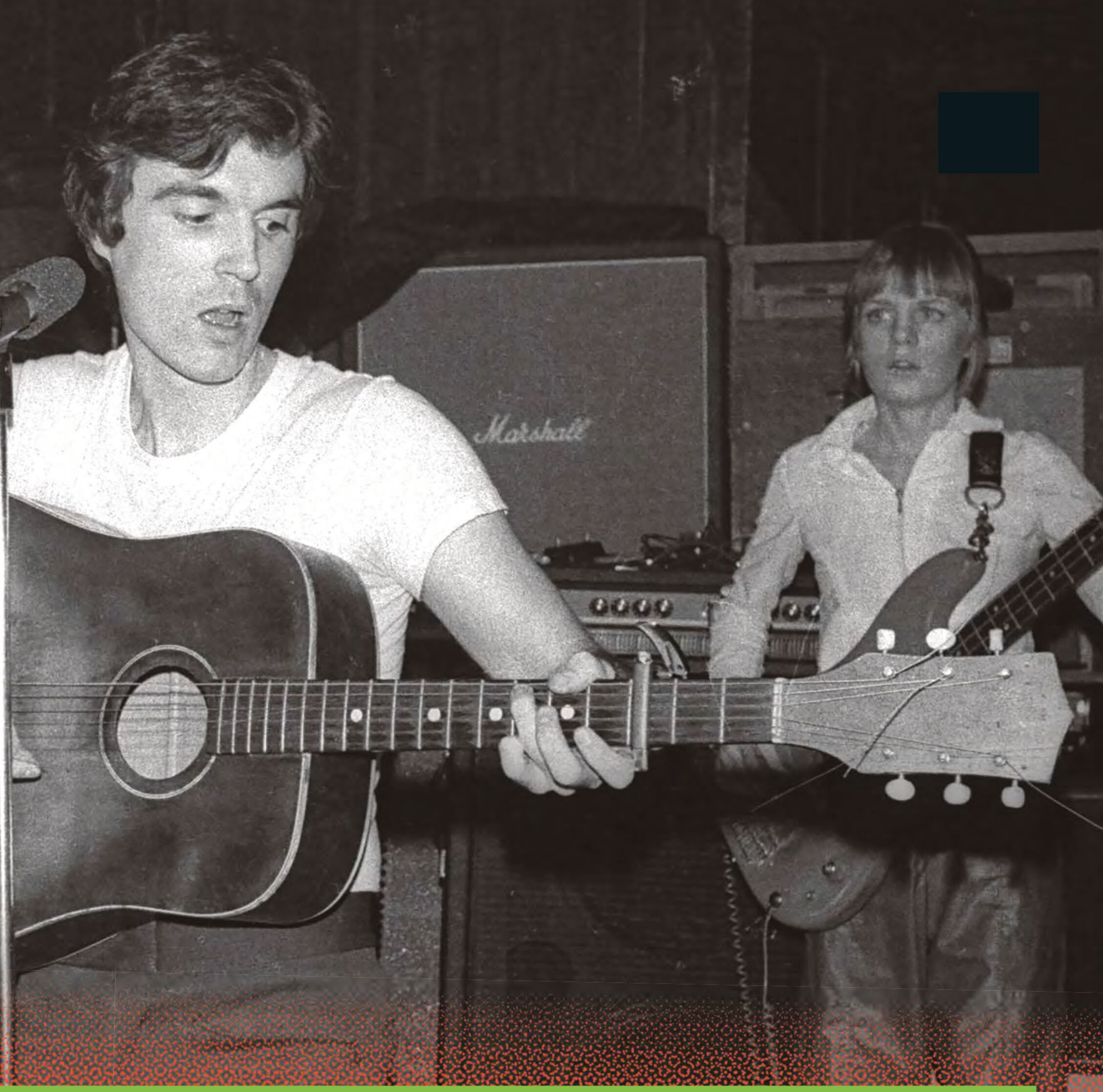


Room with a VU: Byrne, Lou Reed and John Cale at the Ocean Club, New York City, July 21, 1976

ROBERTA BAYLEY/REDFERNS



"We don't feel that we typify that angry attitude"



JOE STEVENS

In the spring of 1977, *MILES* meets a clipped, clean-cut and confrontational four-piece, quite apart from the cliquey CBGB's scene. As they record their debut, *CAROLINE COON* probes the band's psyche to wonder if they really are as progressive as they first appear. "David tries to be very liberal and fair," *TINA WEYMOUTH* tells her. "But he has more preconceptions about women than most."

Talking Heads live on cable TV show *TV-Party*, NYC, 1976

NME 23, APRIL 1977

DAVID BYRNE: "At first, people said we were real intellectual and only smarties would like us – but then all these kids came along and liked us and that proves they were wrong!"

Right now Talking Heads are the cult band in New York City. I went to CBGB's to hear them and half of the new wave bands in New York were in the audience.

They're splashed all over *Punk*, *New York Rocker* and *Gig* magazines, not to mention the *New York Times* and the *New York Daily News*. Personally, I think their "Love → Building On Fire" is the best single released in a 12-month – even better than Television's "Marquee Moon".

Talking Heads: David Byrne, lead guitar, lead vocals, composer of all their songs. A hirsute, tense-looking man who folds his arms, tucking his hands in as if he was in a straitjacket. When his hands escape, they play nervously with objects nearby. I have a tape interview of him rustling book matches.

His speaking voice is quite low – normal but when singing it veers toward a high vibrato. Though he's taking lessons for it, this large but unstable range has been part of the charm of Talking Heads for their cult fans.

Martina Weymouth is the bass player. She is neat, petite, has close cropped blonde hair and dresses in Young Conservative sportswear. She wields a powerful bass which holds the group together since both drums and guitar are clipped and sparse.

Chris Frantz is the drummer. He talks in a slow, liquid, campy New England voice as if his vocal cords were hydraulically controlled. He gestures as though he were holding a Martini in hand. His drumming is brisk, terse and pared down to a minimum – a style which reflects his art-school training and his interest in Andy Warhol and the Minimalists.

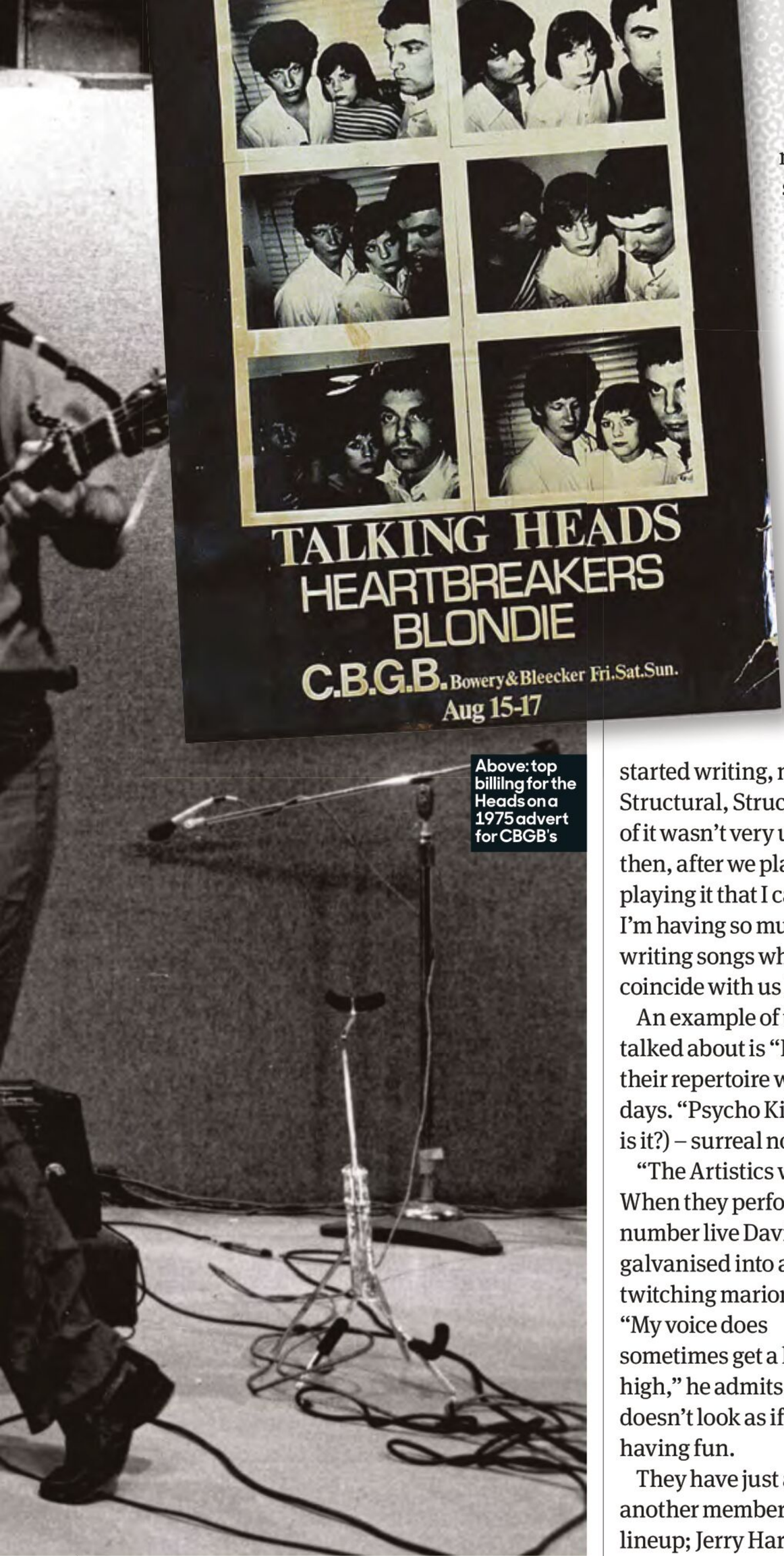
The band began at the Rhode Island School Of Design where they were all three studying. At first David and Chris were in a party band called The Artistics – playing Smokey Robinson and Lou Reed songs just for friends. Like Roxy Music, they have the art-school sensibility but whereas Ferry got off on the Decadent movement, Talking Heads come from the more cerebral tradition of New York minimal art: simple shapes and colours. David, in fact, didn't paint at all – he just used to type out questionnaires as works of art.

> **"My voice does sometimes get a little high..."**
> **DAVID BYRNE**

"Some were about the United States and some of them were about love. Some of them you had to circle different things..." He gulps back his words – I figured he didn't want to talk about his work.

But art college wasn't stimulating enough for them. David dropped out and took a hippy trip around the States. Chris and David moved to New York City bringing Tina with them and decided to try and make it as a band. David: "When you're growing up, you always want to be in a band. Always in the back of your mind if anyone asked

ROBERTA BAYLEY/REDFERNS



Above: top billilng for the Heads on a 1975 advert for CBGB's

you what you want to be, you'd want to be in a band. It was always, 'Well, that's a pretty long shot' so it was, 'Well, I'll take the chance.'

"After rehearsing for about six months and getting some material together – we lived near CBGB's and we noticed that here was a place where few bands were playing at the time and very few people were coming to at the time. It was just beginning and at times there would be 10 people in the audience. We thought it would be a fine place for us to get our thing together and find out what worked in front of an audience. Relatively quickly after that, there started to be more and more groups there." David sat back sharply – as if he'd already said too much.

When they moved to Manhattan they expected to find a bass player relatively quickly but this wasn't to be so. Tina, who was thought of as a singer, was invited instead to join the group as bass player. It was one of the wisest moves they could have made since she plays a solid, hypnotic, repetitive line that supports the rest of them.

I asked them what influence their art training had on their music. David didn't think too much: "Pretty much normal things, like trying not to have any breaks – trying not to have any extraneous musical things going on that aren't necessary, that don't contribute – and try not to have everyone doing exactly the same thing if that's not necessary...."

It seems that playing their material live did more to influence David's writing than art school. "When I first started writing, my stuff was more, I guess, Structural, Structuralist, stuff like that. And a lot of it wasn't very uplifting type sentiments but then, after we played it, it was just so much fun playing it that I can't say negative things when I'm having so much fun. So I'm having to start writing songs which are more fun to sing, which coincide with us having fun singing."

An example of the negative sentiments David talked about is "Psycho Killer", the only song in their repertoire which dates back to Artistics days. "Psycho Killer, Qu'est-ce que c'est?" (What is it?) – surreal non-sequiturs.

"The Artistics was another attitude," Tina says. When they perform the number live David is galvanised into a twitching marionette. "My voice does sometimes get a little high," he admits. He sure doesn't look as if he's having fun.

They have just added another member to the lineup; Jerry Harrison who used to be with the Modern Lovers is on their first album. I asked them how they had gone about finding a new member after playing for almost two years as a trio.
Chris: "There were a number of different musicians that we had come up to our loft to make tapes – not necessarily even for auditions. Like for example we had a cello player –just to see how it would sound on a song – get an idea of what we were capable of doing with other people. We met Jerry up in Boston and later met a friend of his who also used to be in the Modern Lovers, Ernie Brooks, who said that Jerry would be interested in joining. So we really heard it through the grapevine that Jerry might be available."
David: "Just what we wanted. Someone who could play guitar and keyboards." They definitely needed someone because David was having to play full chords all the time, doubling as both rhythm and lead guitarist. David: "The songs can have more dynamics. If there's only one guitar what can I do? But if there's more instruments there's greater variety of texture."

Right now Talking Heads are in the studio working on their first album just prior to a European tour supporting The Ramones. They have chosen Tony Bongiovi to be their producer. Bongiovi has worked with everyone from Jimi Hendrix though Mitzi Gaynor to The Ramones and did Talking Heads' single "Love → Building On Fire".

The future? Which direction is the band going in?
David: "Better songs. Better performances. More efficient."
...And the subject of future songs?
David: "Just try to be honest, contemporary and things like that without getting too obscure."

MILES

Tina Weymouth and Jerry Harrison backstage at CBGB's, NYC, 1977

JOE STEVENS

MM 21, MAY 1977

IMAGINE clips of Fellini's *Satyricon* intercut with stills from Avedon's photographic essay on American mental institutions. Litter the scene with musicians like Joey Ramone, Richard Hell, Patti Smith and the Leeches and you have some idea of what the mayhem spilling over the pavement outside CBGB's at the tough end of the Bowery, is often like.

The Talking Heads do not fit in. They are clean-cut and effete by comparison. More like the novices of a puritanical religious order than nascent rock'n'roll stars.

Nevertheless, the band have played in the cramped gloom of CBGB's for two years, gaining a precarious reputation as New York's best band. The accolade has made them very weary of rock critics and the role they play in a band's career.

Being the fêted cult superstars of a narcissistic, closed-circuit punk media scene was not what they had in mind. They have seen how critics can dispatch their fashionable darlings as fast as they are nominated. A habit, at a time when record companies have been loath to take risks with new talent, which has not been helpful to struggling bands.

So, although the Talking Heads have developed in the heart of punkland, they have worked hard (without putting down the true exponents of the genre) not only to avoid the punk label but also to remain clear-headed about the fanfare which has raged around them since they first started performing in public.

"In a way," says Tina Weymouth (bass), "we were always outside the CBGB's scene. They were very snotty to us there because we didn't dress like the New York Dolls.

"The first time we played there was the second time we'd ever performed and we started getting publicity very quickly. The other bands didn't like it and they were very unfriendly. We were unpopular until we got a bit of a following.

"Our crowd was very different to the Ramones' and Television's. Very different to the girls who wear stilettos. It took us a year to turn them on to us. Then we started playing on the same nights as Television and together we kept breaking the audience record — and we became established as something to be contended with. Now the other bands are more friendly."

"The first time we played CBGB's was the second time we'd ever performed"
TINA WEYMOUTH

TINA IS sitting, with the rest of the band, in the small basement studio of puce-painted Sire Records. She is guarded, with a steel-like front which belies her fair, blue-eyed, Dresden-china appearance.

Opposite her is drummer Chris Frantz whose exaggerated drawl gives him an air of genial disdain. Across the room, ex-Modern Lover Jerry Harrison (a recent addition to the Heads lineup), sticks out his long legs, making it easy for lead singer David Byrne to indulge the retiring side of his nature by hiding behind them in a corner.

David writes the band's songs and it is he, with a chilling ability to suppress anything other than his own meticulous musical ideas, who has given Talking Heads their unique identity.

He is one of those sedulous people who are torn between a contempt for what they are and a supreme belief in what they could become. He has a tendency to pare down everything he creates to a skeletal form just short of non-existence. Then he hangs the minimal structure with cryptic clues to indicate what should flesh out the spaces.

His music, delivered, of course, with frantic exactitude, has the uncanny effect of making listeners feel as if they are travelling fast backwards through a soundtrack of black disco soul. All the dance-riff references are there, but they are sucked dry of sensuality.

Tina, taught by David, plays bass like a pupil of Donald "Duck" Dunn or Leroy Hodges. Chris drums with Howard Grimes precision and, when the band cut into Al Green's "Take Me To The River" (as they did at CBGB's when I saw them a few weeks ago), their main influence becomes crystal clear. Willie Mitchell would pale at the speed of it all.

Needless to say, this accelerated Memphis sound is shot through with cold disaffection for the modern world. And on stage, David, looking like an android with a loose connection, is in good company when, in songs like "No Compassion", he cries, "I don't care anymore."

All four Heads have played instruments since they were children and David, Chris and Jerry have been in bands since junior high school. Chris: "Bands always seemed like something that was fun, but when I first started, having a band that you could earn your living with seemed impossible — it was something completely out of your ball game."

Jerry: "There was this tremendous gulf between bands that recorded records and bands that didn't. In the '60s, record companies released thousands of albums and lots of them went nowhere, but at least the companies wanted to get hold of what was going to be successful. It was almost as if they were trying to build a star system in the way movie studios did in the '30s.

"But in the '70s they decided it made more sense to spend a million dollars on advertising the new Elton John album so that it would sell three million, than it did to give 50 bands 10,000 dollars each to make an album.

"What happened was that creativity shrank and the gulf between young musicians and success became even larger in the recent few years when the bands who were selling records placed such an emphasis on technique."

Talking Heads is the second incarnation of a band called the Artistics, put together "to relieve the boredom" by David and Chris when they were at the elite Rhode Island School Of Design. At college parties they played their own numbers, interspersed with Smokey Robinson, Paul Revere & The Raiders and Lou Reed covers. But, when they moved to NYC, they decided to get serious.

Tina, an ex-RISD student too (and an ardent Artistics fan) came to the city with Chris. All three of them moved into a loft and, when every available musician turned down playing with such a "straight" band, David, reluctant at first, was eventually persuaded to include Tina. They rehearsed for three months before their first public performance.

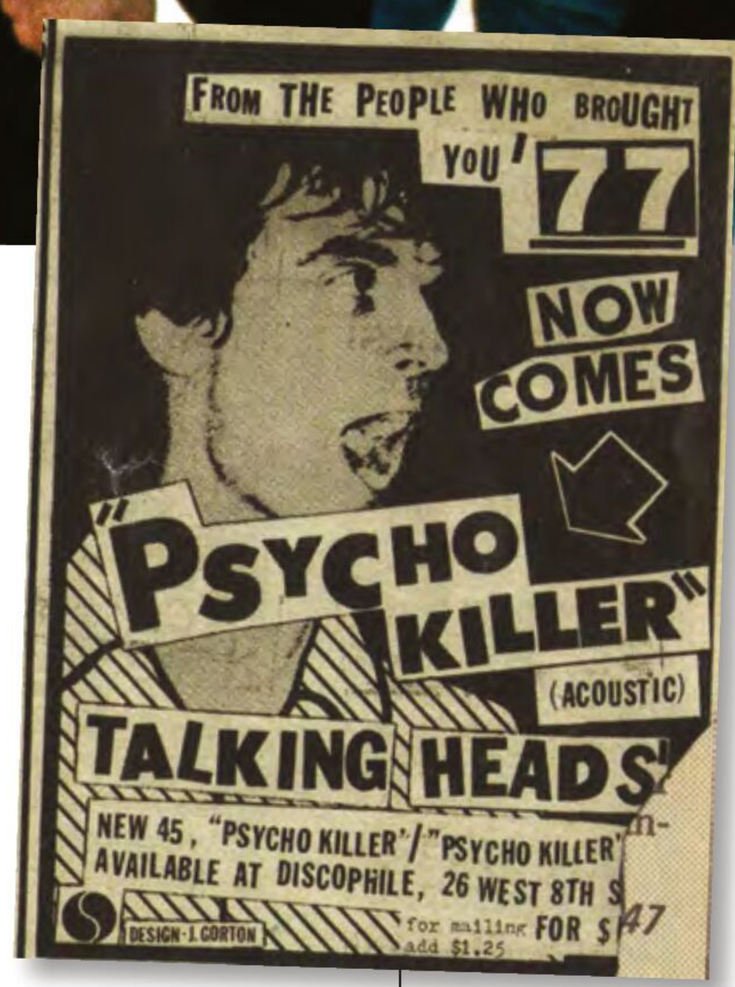
David intended the band to remain a three-piece. "Every time I'd seen bands, I'd always thought there was too much noise," he explains, in a voice as soft as his grandfather's Scottish burr. "There always seemed to be too many instruments and they got mumbled so you didn't get a clear or clean-type sound. One way I thought of to get around this was to have only three instruments.

"With all the muddle and the reverb bouncing off club walls, I thought we could get the extra sound and that three musicians might be enough.

"But after a while, and as we got better, I started to feel it was limiting. If one of us stopped playing for an instant then the whole song would sound really spare. You couldn't change the dynamics of the song as you had to be playing all the time."

They started looking for another guitarist and auditioned "dozens" without success. Just by chance Chris happened to hear, through friends, that Jerry was available. He was invited to jam

Talking Heads in Amsterdam, May 6, 1977: (l-r) Chris Frantz, Tina Weymouth, David Byrne and Jerry Harrison



with them at an Ocean Club gig. And, from the start, he fitted in as if he were tailor-made for the job – the ultimate answer to what they wanted. His keyboard playing was a bonus.

Why, since CBGB's has been their teething ground for so long, don't Talking Heads consider their music to be punk?

"We don't feel that in our performance we typify that angry attitude," says David. "We don't eschew the primitivism – you know, the less is more and the more is less – but that's not quite what we're doing.

"They tend to believe that if you do something in a slick way, then it has no feeling. We don't hold that to be true. That doesn't necessarily mean we want to be real slick. At the same time, just not being slick doesn't mean that it's coming from the heart.

"I like to leave it up to someone else to say whether we're New and that's Old. I didn't think of the band as joining the new wave but I did start out by thinking that I'd like to do something a little fresher than what you see in the chart!"

Jerry, however, does feel part of a new movement.

"All the bands sort of support each other," he says. "The music is diverse but it has developed just by the fact that everyone has played at CBGB's. In movements, people learn from each other and that's been true with this music. Musicians have moved between bands – like Television's Fred Smith. He used to play in Blondie.

"CBGB's is a place where people can play and hear music. I contrast this with how it used to be for me in the Modern Lovers. We didn't have a place like that. All we could play were gigs in high schools. I felt much more alone at that time. Talking Heads' music is not at all like anybody else's and yet I still feel part of the positive climate there is here. I didn't feel like that at all in the Modern Lovers until we'd got to the point where people started to write about us."

After hearing word from across the water that Talking Heads were uniquely different from any other band, it was something of a shock to hear their single debut on vinyl. It was one of their best numbers, "Love → Buildings On Fire", but produced to sound just like any other glossy pop single. Only the B-side, the sparse "New Feelings", hinted at the Heads' real musical direction.

"The A-side was a sort of experiment," says David. "We got this arranger to come in and I let these people do normal mixes, like on pop songs, just to see what would happen. And that's what happened. It came out sounding pretty normal.

"I thought, 'We're taken to be such a strange band, let's see what these people who ARE so mainstream do when they handle it. Let's mix that together and see what they come up with.'

"What happened is nothing really to do with what we're about. But it was fun."

The band are halfway through recording their first album, which will include songs like "Tentative Decision", "The Book I Read", "Happy Day", "No Compassion", "Uh-Oh Love Comes To Town", "I Feel It In My Heart", "Thank You For Sending Me An Angel", "Who Is It?" and "I'm Not In Love" (written before the 10cc hit).

David: "The album isn't sounding at all like ▶

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS

Heads in Hollywood, December 17, 1977

the single. There won't be any horns! But we want to be dynamic and to create mood. The single was produced in a hurry but now we're taking a lot of care with everything and we're working a lot longer to get the sound we want."

Why does he only write love songs?

"I thought it would be nice to write about other things," he says, "but it would be hard to sing those songs with as much feeling. I find it easier, when I'm singing, to recapture the feeling of the words as I wrote them, when songs are about personal relationships. I can drift back into that frame of mind. I don't feel I have that conviction when I sing about something more abstract."

Does that mean that Talking Heads are detached from the political machinations of their country?

Tina: "I think everyone is detached right now because the whole Nixon/Watergate thing hurt so much. And everybody's so bored with it they don't want to hear about it anymore.

"It disillusioned so many people to realise that all the rumours going around were true."

David: "I think everybody feels small about it."

Jerry: "A lot of us are really disappointed that a lot more hasn't happened as a result of Watergate. I mean, the stuff that I'd been telling my parents for years turned out to be true – stuff that sometimes you couldn't believe yourself, it sounded so much like you'd been reading too many spy magazines. But not only was it true but it turned out to be even worse than you thought.

"I thought that in the wake of Watergate, there was going to be a little more truth told. But there wasn't. It's all been submerged back even stronger. And I think it sucks. It's all a great disappointment."

Do they see rock'n'roll as any kind of political force?

"I almost think that rock'n'roll is an opiate – if Marx were alive today he'd probably call it the opium of the people," says Jerry. "I don't want to tell people what to do but I think they abdicate their responsibility for their own lives. I'd like people to understand that every action they take has a meaning — not only for themselves but other people."

David: "I don't think rock'n'roll is as direct as more specific kinds of protest. I don't think of it as being able to confront things issue by issue. On the other hand, it can imply there's another frame of mind than the one that is generally accepted — that you don't have to think of things in the way that people have told you to think of them."

DAVID'S MANNER and appearance is brittle and dry: his short-sleeved Aertex shirt and never-smiling face, his few words. And sentences which trail off and are not completed because the inconclusive silence is soon filled by another member of the band. And yet he doesn't leave you with the feeling that he is all enigmatic front and style. He is self-effacing but deep and dominating when he wants to be.

He is pretty shy with people he doesn't know, but he is always gadding about town with his close friends.

"I like to be with one or two people I know rather well. I don't like to stay in my apartment alone," he says. "I feel that it's important to get out and see what's happening. I don't feel I have to work so hard keeping tabs on what's going on in music because I'm aware of it. But in other areas I feel I do. I like to see comedians or read books that I normally wouldn't.

"I look at books and magazines which don't have anything to do with music and then I just think about things in general. And then I write a song. I go through a period of reading things and concentrating on one particular idea to get my mind completely inundated. And then I write a song hoping that it will be effected by that chain of thought. The song will be about a personal relationship but the ideas, inspired by the book I'd been reading, won't be."

In what frame of mind does David write best?

"When I'm happy," he answers, without hesitation. "I always thought that it would be possible and I always wanted to write stuff when I got real upset – like when I'd broken up with a girlfriend or something. I'd think, 'I'm full of emotion, I should be able to put something into a song.' Not necessarily about that situation, but I thought it should be possible to get the same intensity of feeling into any subject at that point.

"But you can't 'cos you're too upset. So I find that it's best to think back on the bad things, or good things, and write when you're feeling confident about what you're doing because you're happy.

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

"And," he continues, "I always wanted to be a collaborative writer. But I haven't been able to do that either. I haven't been able to communicate what I wanted and I've never taken up suggestions anyway. I'd want them, but when I got them I never thought they were right and I'd always end up writing the song myself."

Says Tina: "I've watched David write songs. When he hasn't worked out the chords his voice will be wavering all over the place and it sounds terrible. But I've learned not to say anything. And, naturally, the whole process rests with him because they are his songs and his ideas in the first place."

Seeing Tina on stage, playing the fluidly melodic bass lines, which are one of the distinguishing features of the Heads' sounds, looks like a breakthrough for equality. As Jerry points out, she is not window-dressing but a working member of the band. Tina, however, seems tense and unhappy in the presence of the band, especially David.

David made it clear from the start that he plays with her because no other bass player in New York ("they were all trying to look like David Johansen") would give them the time of day.

"I was wary of playing with Tina," he explains, "because people might not like it. Rock'n'roll is thought of as a male idiom and as male music, and I wasn't sure how it would be received. When it was sort of suggested that she play bass, I knew I'd have to show her what to do, so I said I'd give it a try."

Tina: "It really wasn't like that at all. It was sort of suggested that I could join the band in some sort of capacity – first as a singer. (That wasn't suggested to me, says David.) But I'd played guitar when I was 15 and at that time became discouraged by other people's idea that it was a boy's thing.

"We were afraid that instantly people would think I was a gimmick. So I was never projected. I played the role of one of those bass players who stand in the background. I never got into any sexy clothes or any sexual poses to play up the fact that I was a girl. And, in fact, David thought it was a good idea when I wanted to cut my hair, as there would be even less difference between us all."

David: "My reluctance about Tina was only to do with music. Tina didn't know how to play bass but we're not a band that improvises. So I thought that, since the songs were all worked out, she could learn the parts by note and then, if it could be practised enough, she could do it."

In other words he presumes that women have a lower IQ than men?

"No," says David. "It had to do with the fact that Tina couldn't play bass. But I didn't think it would matter – if we did the songs the same every time."

"Yes," contradicts Tina. "David tries to be very liberal and fair and not to have preconceptions. But, of the many people I've met, he has more preconceptions about women than most.

"We all went to see Lou Reed once and we told him what we were planning as our line up and he said, 'Oh, great! That's brilliant! You get a chick who can play and that's brilliant 'cos chicks will do anything you tell them to do. Just tell her to do it and she'll do it, and you won't have to go through the hassles you have to with guys.' And that's true. A lot of men think that way.

"And I did put myself in that position. I was a sort of machine. But this is, you know, how I'm getting my start. I don't see myself as being forever in this position. I don't see myself as a machine forever. I also have creative urges.

"I feel that I could just leave this band and I could become part of an all-girl band. But I don't want to do that because all the girls I know are like me. They don't have the playing experience. This band has given me the opportunity to earn and be moulded into a style. I mean, I've learned everything from David. He's not a teacher: I've learned so much just by proximity. And in this band I'm in a position to get really good.

"But it's very depressing to talk about what can't be accomplished. And I'd drive everyone crazy if I talked about women and equality all the time. You just have to get on with it and talk about what can be done."

> **"We want commercial success but never again will I make the music more mainstream"**
> **DAVID BYRNE**

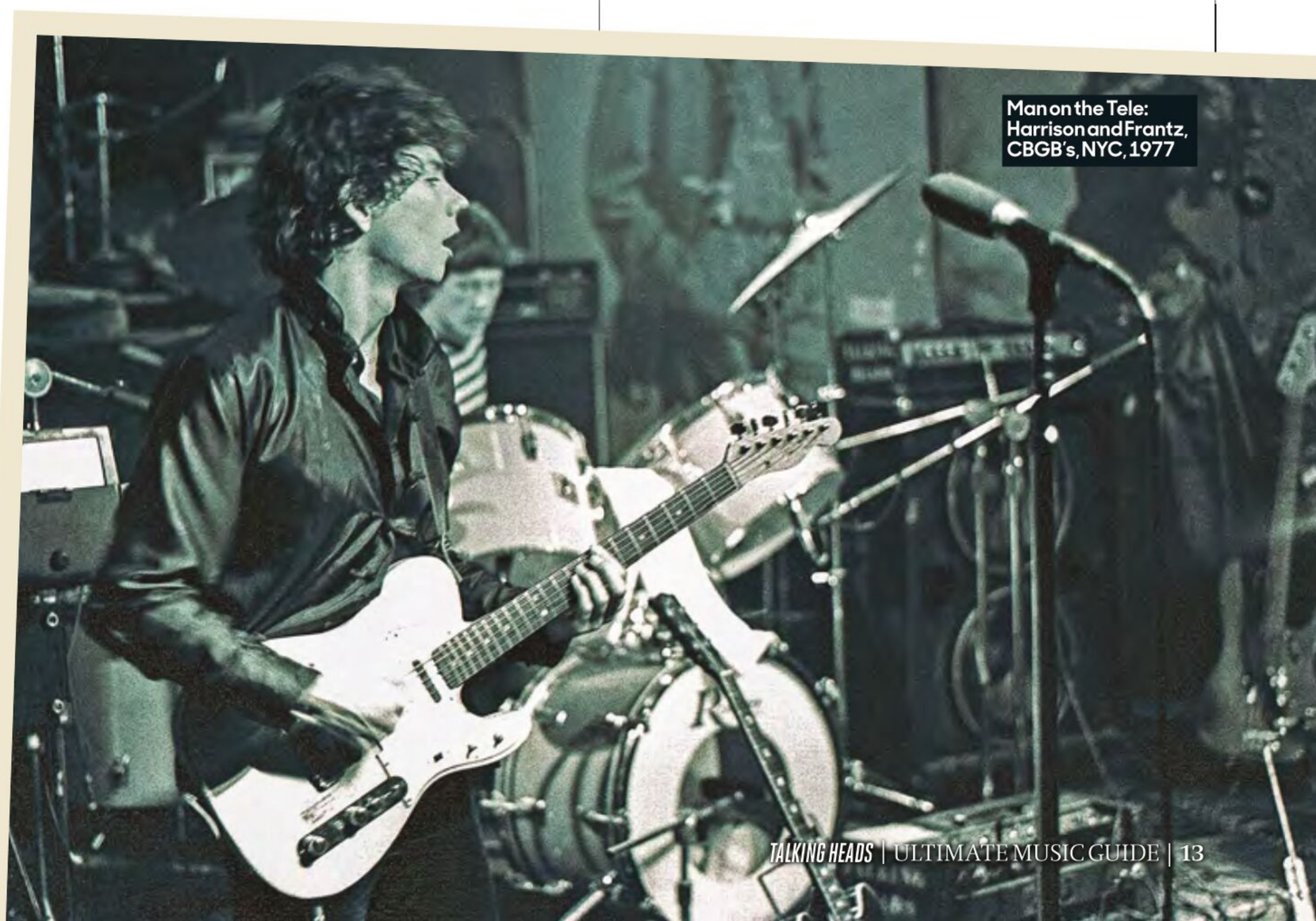
There is tension in the band, perhaps because David and Tina have similar strong characters and opinions. Chris and Jerry act as soothing influences. The undercurrent friction, however, complements the fundamentally stark quality of the Talking Heads' sound, adding the abrasive dimension to their music which has led New York critics to talk of the band in terms of "alienation".

As a group they don't inspire a warm initial response. They are far too suspicious and defensive. But, because they are so self-contained and isolated from the fashionable influences around them, they have an immediate, if uncomfortable, impact. The pace, economy and intensity of their music is in sync with the times. They are polished and accomplished technicians.

Talking Heads, especially with Jerry in the lineup, are also blessed with an onstage magnetism which is not only unique, but screams success. They are a band who are about to become huge. Especially if they can deliver their refreshing original sound (rather than the disappointingly normal single "Love → Buildings On Fire") on the forthcoming album.

David: "Naturally we want commercial success but never again, no way, will I make the music more mainstream. If we aren't successful then I'll just think that our initial ideas weren't refined enough and that we weren't communicating well enough. If anything, I think we would then have to be more unusual – well, not just unusual, exactly. We'd just have to do what we're doing better." ▲

NEW YORK CITY / ALAMY STOCKPHOTO



Man on the Tele: Harrison and Frantz, CBGB's, NYC, 1977

TALKING HEADS: 77

RELEASED: SEPTEMBER 16, 1977

"I've been to college!" "Mad Dave" and his preppy punk associates arrive in NYC intent on turning erudite weirdness into the new wave. The straight world is impressed. BY JIM WIRTH

WHEN SUICIDE'S Alan Vega saw band-of-the-moment Talking Heads at an early CBGB's show, the keyboard warrior was not enamoured of frontman David Byrne. "It was all studied," he recalled. "He didn't make any twitchy gestures without in his head saying, 'Make a twitchy gesture now.'"

Alongside Patti Smith and Television – all different shades of rock'n'roll romanticism – Talking Heads' pop-art disembowelment of soul and funk did not ring entirely true. They were out-of-towners, posh kids slumming it in the big city, but if contemporaries were wary, the studied quirkiness of their debut album offered a well-ironed alternative to the ripped jeans and rabble-rousing of The Clash, the Sex Pistols and the Ramones.

"I've been to college, I've been to school," Byrne cheeps defiantly on Stax-heeled opening track "Uh-Oh, Love Comes To Town", owning his privilege without shame. The straight world approved; the then unbearably square *Rolling Stone* made Talking Heads their Most Promising New Artist of 1977 (though they had to share the award with Peter Gabriel). Not necessarily cool, but an accolade fit for a band whose bohemian veneer concealed grand ambitions.

Drummer Chris Frantz and singer David Byrne first came together at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, performing together with the Artistics – whose set included Al Green's "Love And Happiness" and Smokey Robinson's "Tears Of A Clown" as well as larval versions of future Talking Heads favourites. Known as "Mad Dave" on campus, ex-pat Scot Byrne quickly dropped out of his course, his fantasies of taking the Big Apple art world by storm percolating as he grilled hot dogs at a '50s-themed restaurant called New York Systems.

Some of his wildest dreams came true after he joined Frantz and his tightly wound girlfriend Martina Weymouth at their New York loft in 1974. Weymouth willed herself to become a bass player, and the three-piece inveigled their way into the Bowery art-rock world as Talking Heads. Sire Records boss Seymour Stein was smitten by their early live shows, but the band cutely held out on signing a recording deal until November 1976, waiting – perhaps – to ride that new wave.

A kitchen-sink production job slightly swamped the minimalist charm of their debut single "Love → Building On Fire" (think Paul Klee's "Twittering Machine" set to music), but Talking Heads filled in the gaps rather more effectively before completing *Talking Heads: 77*, bringing in former Modern Lover Jerry Harrison to flesh out their all-elbows sound. Stein, meanwhile, delayed its release until the autumn as his label switched distributors in the US, keen to ensure that a record with genuine appeal beyond the city limits would (unlike the Ramones LPs) be available from coast to coast.

CRITICS' VERDICT

"The playing throughout is exemplary, particularly Tina Weymouth's engaging bass and leader David Byrne's rhythm guitar work, which is ever inventive, refusing to take the easy way out of predictable consistency. There's much to praise, not least the quality of the songs."
CHRIS BRAZIER, MELODY MAKER, OCTOBER 1, 1977

"The recorded versions of such potential masterpieces as 'No Compassion' and particularly 'Psycho Killer' fail to approximate the sheer grandiosity and hypertension these songs cry out for and which live performances provide."
NICK KENT, NME, OCTOBER 8, 1977

Old-school rock producer Tony Bongiovi added some Top 40 gloss to *Talking Heads: 77*, but it's a record with a determined oddness at its core, Byrne channelling the 'hello trees, hello sky' naivety of Jonathan Richman, and the theatrical quirkiness of Sparks, as he regenerates from nerdy outcast into pop-star contender. With the highlife jangle of ecstatic closer "Pulled Up", he can sense his moment of triumph coming. "*Mummy, daddy come and look at me now,*" he beams. "*I'm a big man in a great big town.*"

Frantz, Harrison and Weymouth's contributions to Talking Heads have been routinely understated over the years, but for all his bandmates' stylish little musical touches (Frantz's steelpans on "Uh-Oh...", Harrison's slide guitar on "No Compassion", that Weymouth bassline on "Psycho Killer") *Talking Heads: 77* is still a portrait of Byrne. The sullen sociopath of "Psycho Killer", and the character caught in the crossfire in the battle of the sexes on "Tentative Decisions" are very much avatars of the withdrawn singer, who would later put his social awkwardness down to a self-diagnosis of "borderline Asperger's".

The minor-chord slashes of "No Compassion" reflect Byrne's impatience with neurotypical chatter ("*My interest level's dropping/I've heard all I want to and I don't want to hear any more*"), but what shines brightest through *Talking Heads: 77* is the 25-year-old's absolute belief that his eccentricity will be the

TALKING HEADS: 77

TRACKMARKS

1. Uh-Oh, Love Comes to Town ★★★★
2. New Feeling ★★★★
3. Tentative Decisions ★★★★
4. Happy Day ★★★
5. Who Is It? ★★
6. No Compassion ★★★
7. The Book I Read ★★★
8. Don't Worry About The Government ★★★★
9. First Week/Last Week... Carefree ★★★
10. Psycho Killer ★★★★★
11. Pulled Up ★★★★★

Label: Sire
Produced by: Tony Bongiovi, Lance Quinn and Talking Heads
Recorded at: Sundragon and ODO, New York
Personnel: David Byrne (guitar, vocals), Chris Frantz (drums, steel pans), Jerry Harrison (guitar, keyboards, backing vocals), Tina Weymouth (bass)
Highest chart position: UK 60; US 97

THE BYRNE OF TALKING HEADS: 77 WAS AT HIS CORE PROFOUNDLY, THRILLINGLY EGOTISTICAL

making of him. The French bits in "Psycho Killer" were largely written by Weymouth, but the man-as-superman sentiment of "*Réalisant mon espoir, je me lance, vers la gloire*" (translation: realising my hopes, I throw myself towards glory) is entirely down to the defiantly self-centred frontman.

IN HIS memoir, *Remain In Love*, Frantz claims that Byrne exhibited in a group show during his time in Providence, irking fellow artists by sneaking into the gallery to give his work more prominence before opening night. While the Byrne of *Talking Heads: 77* celebrates friendship on "New Feeling" and "Don't Worry About The Government", and even romantic love on "The Book I Read", he was at his core profoundly, thrillingly egotistical.

On "Pulled Up", he admires the beauty of his silhouette on the living room wall ("*Dark and savage with a profile so sharp*"), and urges himself to be badder still on "No Compassion" ("*Be a little more selfish/It might do you some good*"). It is the kind of logic that – Frantz would claim – led Byrne to scrub bandmates' writing credits from the original pressings of *Talking Heads: 77* (though Frantz and Weymouth would later claw back a share of "Psycho Killer").

The cheerleading of fellow smarty-pants Brian Eno would further inflate Byrne's ego as Talking Heads entered their supposed imperial phase, but *Talking Heads: 77* still just about feels like a collective endeavour, the work of a band with a collegiately defined pose to strike. Rolling eyes at the punks Talking Heads encountered when they toured Europe with the Ramones in 1977, Byrne said: "It used to be bad boys in drag and now its bad boys in ripped clothing. It's just another romantic notion that Europeans like to go for: the drunk on the corner has more wisdom than the guy in the ivory tower."

Talking Heads: 77 forcefully rejects that sentiment. Beneath it's naive veneer, it's brilliantly hard-headed, and thrilled with its own smartness. As he clocked Byrne's stage tics in 1976, Vega perhaps sensed Talking Heads' disdain for tortured authenticity, their refusal to accept that preppy, privileged kids should stay in their lane. Success, after all, was what they had been raised for. "*I think of things that I might be,*" Byrne yelps on "Pulled Up". "*I see my name go down in history.*" ▲

MORE SONGS ABOUT BUILDINGS AND FOOD

RELEASED: JULY 14, 1978

With their heads turned by disco and record sessions with the monk-like, long-fingered Eno, Talking Heads launch a trilogy embroiled in worldly grooves. BY JON DALE

ON THEIR debut album from 1977, Talking Heads effortlessly embodied another head of the hydra that was New York City's feverish musical ferment. "The sound of a panic attack massaged into a way of life" was how Will Hermes memorably described it, and David Byrne's voice, in particular, had a peculiar otherness that made the group stand out from their peers. On tour with the Ramones, the latter were shocked that the Heads read books while on the road, and they couldn't stand the James Brown tape that Weymouth insisted on playing in the tour van. The revenge of the nerds? It sure looked that way. In 1978, then, Talking Heads had to figure out how to capitalise on the impact of their debut. A set of interactions, some found by chance, some led by fortune, would subsequently head them off in a new, thrilling direction.

The group's original plan for 1978's *More Songs About Building And Food* was to continue working with Tony Bongiovi and Lance Quinn, the two producers who had helmed *Talking Heads: 77*. Bongiovi's history, including his work with Disco Corporation Of America, made the collaboration particularly canny, given the way disco was beginning to infect the listening and creative habits of some of Talking Heads' peers. Bongiovi had also recently founded the soon-to-be-legendary Power Station Studios. Drawing on songs old and new, it looked like Talking Heads were ready to go, following the threads their debut had woven.

Everything changed, though, after the group met Brian Eno while in London. This was the beginning of a mutual appreciation society that would lead to three extraordinary Talking Heads LPs, a groundbreaking collaboration between Byrne and Eno, and a fundamental change in group dynamics that would have ongoing repercussions for all involved. In 1978, though, everything was rosy: the group were won over by Eno's charms, Weymouth saying that he reminded the group of a "young Jesuit monk", with "very long slender fingers" and "very idealistic hands", while Eno celebrated the group's arch, knowing bent, "constructing music in a kind of conceptual way". Indeed, on Eno's late-1977 album *Before And After Science*, the title of the song "King's Lead Heat" is an anagram of the band's name.

The group's musical dialect was opening up, too. Weymouth and Frantz were in love with funk and R&B, and the group were putting in heavy hours listening to Parliament-Funkadelic; they'd been blown away by Fela Kuti, who Eno had introduced them to in a listening session. Byrne had also recently been drafted in as a guitarist on Dinosaur's "Kiss Me Again", the first disco single produced by Arthur Russell, a composer-cellist-songwriter polymath whose ultimate dream was to make "Buddhist bubblegum pop": Russell had recently been turned on by the queer and egalitarian pleasures of disco's dancefloors.

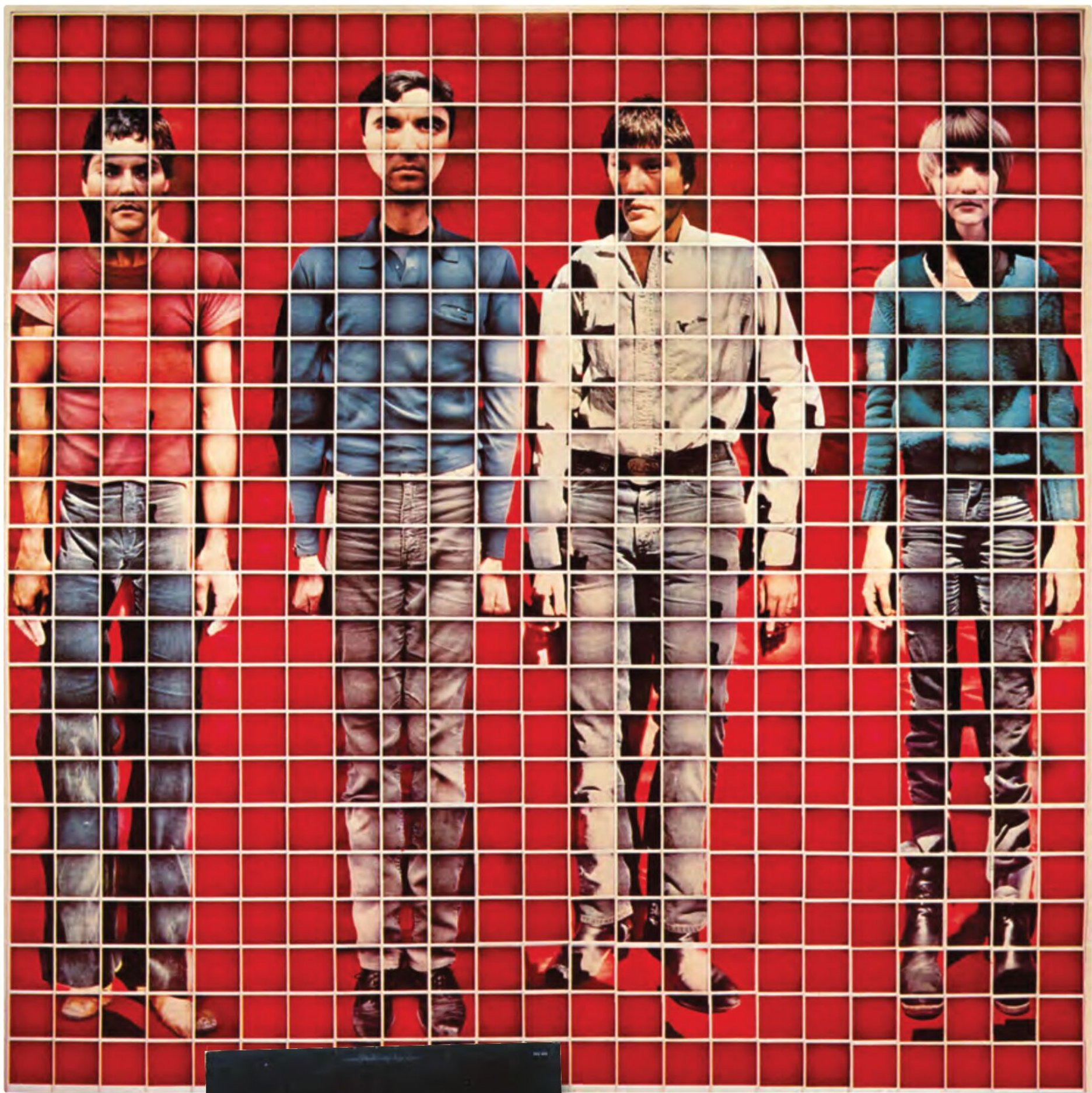
If Talking Heads were hemmed in, conceptually rigid, Russell was loose and uncertain, both confident and incredibly shy, and unable to reach conclusions. In the open space he constructed during the Dinosaur recording sessions, Byrne came into his own as an elliptical funk guitarist, and he's never bettered the clipped, tetchy playing he brought to the song. You can certainly hear how it has informed his subsequent style – the chicken-scratch micro-riffs of "With Our Love" from *More Songs...* collapse the similar circularity of Afrobeat, funk and disco into tendril-like mosaics of groove.

Russell soon felt that Byrne and Talking Heads were taking advantage of his creative findings, though; after all, while Russell had been working on "Kiss Me Again" throughout 1977, Weymouth and Frantz had complained about its repetitive bassline ricocheting through the apartment building they shared. And now they were funk ambassadors? Maybe Russell had a point; these were certainly curious developments. But if nothing else, it was all a sign that people were thinking in similar directions, with the NYC underground opening up to the possibilities of black music.

CRITICS' VERDICT

"The music moves forward with ringing clarity and sizzling urgency. Every guitar figure, every drum roll, every bassline, every synth embellisment, every startling sentiment is relished to the hilt. That is what great rock'n'roll is about, after all. It touches all the vital parts at one and the same time."
IAN BIRCH, MM, JULY 15, 1978

"This is a dirty great panoramic Technicolor job with battles going on all over the show. Byrne's voice mixed right down into the cocksure Valkyrie guitars and skidding synthesisers. And cherubs hold up the sky!"
JULIE BIRCHILL, NME, JULY 15, 1978



TRACKMARKS

1. Thank You For Sending Me An Angel ★★★★★
2. With Our Love ★★★★
3. The Good Thing ★★★★
4. Warning Sign ★★★★
5. The Girls Just Want To Be With The Girls ★★★★
6. Found A Job ★★★★
7. Artists Only ★★★★
8. I'm Not In Love ★★★★
9. Stay Hungry ★★★
10. Take Me To The River ★★★★
11. The Big Country ★★★★

Label: Sire
Produced by: Brian Eno, Talking Heads
Recorded at: Compass Point, Nassau
Personnel: David Byrne (vocals, guitar, synthesised percussion), Chris Frantz (drums, percussion); Jerry Harrison (piano, organ, synth, guitar, backing vocals), Tina Weymouth (bass), Brian Eno (synths, piano, guitar, percussion, backing vocals), Tina and the Typing Pool (bk vocals on "The Good Thing")
Highest chart position: UK 21; US 29

THIS IS THE FIRST ALBUM WHERE JERRY HARRISON CONTRIBUTES HIS OWN PARTS

THE SURPRISING thing about 1978's *More Songs About Buildings And Food*, then, is how it somehow balances all of its influences – the group's grounding in proto-punk like the Velvets and Modern Lovers, and their newfound fascination with funk, R&B and disco – into a streamlined set of songs that present the four-piece as a fully integrated unit. This is the first album where Jerry Harrison contributes his own parts, and you can hear the way his peculiar logic opens up the music. Meanwhile, Weymouth and Frantz are coming to the fore as a tightly interlocked rhythm section. Weymouth, in particular, is on stunning form here, her piston-pulse bass routing the songs into new zones of danceability.

More Songs... might suffer, a little, for its best song being first. "Thank You For Sending Me An Angel" is all nervy asides and rambunctious, idiot energy, with Byrne's vocals a tense mess – he sounds like a sexually frustrated chihuahua. There's a great run of songs across side one that seem almost to merge into one another, a one-mind narrative through the glittering pop-lite of "The Good Thing" and the low-slung yet heady groove "Warning Sign" into the hilarious "Found A Job", where Byrne's lyrics are at their wry best, a broken-down relationship transferred into a television show. It's a McLuhanesque mass mediation of the failings of love, and a nice commentary on the unreality of the new everyday we're lost within.

Flip the record, and Eno's presence is a little more obvious, though still fairly reserved; the songs get weirder and more expansive, and the group navigate this shifting terrain brilliantly. "Artists Only", another meta-commentary of sorts, is particularly beautiful, a song where the parts interlock in such an integrated manner, it's hard to parse into constituent elements. The production glimmers and glitters, and the group sound newly confident. "I'm Not In Love" is a stop-start hymn to denial; the cover of Al Green's "Take Me To The River" is steady, prowling, and Byrne is surprisingly disarmed in his vocal performance. Over the next few years, the group would uncover some startingly different ways to make music, fracturing their membership in the process. For now, though, *More Songs...* promised plenty. ▲

David Byrne in 1978: tense, nervous, unable to relax...

"We run the risk of our natural image becoming a cliché"

After a – to them – overly-slick debut, the "naturally austere" Talking Heads return with an album recorded in the Bahamas with Brian Eno. Have they retained their integrity? Or are they their producer's plaything? "It's definitely our music," they tell *TONY PARSONS*. "Other bands Eno has worked with have been an extension of Eno."

NME JULY 22, 1978

"YOUR WIFE didn't like our album," smarts a Talking Head before I'm even sitting comfortably.

Damn that television! What a bad picture! Don't get upset! It's not a major disaster!

The phrase Talking Head was originally coined in Stateside video terminology. It's American media jargonese for a static head 'n' shoulders camera shot of the twice-nightly, coast-to-coast, impassive harbingers of the Planet Earth's interminable horrorshow.

Conservatively attired, conscientiously poker-faced, the scrupulously objective anti-personalities parrot another man's lifeless litany of the day-to-day confluence of kidnappings, mass-murders, race-riots, bombings, hi-jackings, strikes, assassinations, Washington's political science, Russia's dissident-disposal industry...

Kid, these Talking Heads have seen it ALL: nothing touches them they're numb inside, they got no heart.

Decay! Doom! Death! Destruction! Armageddon! And now for the weather!

So watching the Talking Heads evokes no more passion in the viewer than gawping at the Test Card. Anybody can shock a baby or a television audience, but it's too easy and the effect is disproportionate to the effort. Look out, honey, they're using technology to arrange the world so that we don't have to experience it.

"I just read the review... your wife didn't like our album? What did you think?"

Save for the very same enigmatic handle, the TV Eye's desensitised pawn-cocktails bear no similarity whatsoever to the quartet of young Americans remaining perfectly civilised if somewhat, ah, distant as they size me up with polite suspicion in this darkened hotel room located in one of the more sedate residential areas of Kensington, SW7.

> "I just read the review... your wife didn't like our album? What did you think?"
> *DAVID BYRNE*

As the others watch my hands for any sudden movements and stonily stare me out without breaching the fundamental rules of social etiquette, mild-mannered Chris Frantz (doe-faced drummer) plays Henry Kissinger, perching on an arm-rest at the other end of the sofa where I recline, and asks me for my thoughts on the recently released second Talking Heads album, *More Songs About Buildings And Food*, produced by Brian Eno.

As I conjecture that the hot-off-the-presses vinylised evidence seems to suggest that Eno needs Talking Heads whereas Talking Heads really don't need Brian Eno, the rest of the band are less loquacious than Chris and not so willing to place their person within gobbing distance of me.

Chris's wife, blonde bassist (Mar)tina Weymouth, sprawls across a big brass bed sucking on a Camel and resembling a younger, prettier, more wholesome edition of Marianne Faithfull.

Over by the window is inscrutable ex-Modern Lover Jerry Harrison (keyboards and guitar), and between him and Chris there sits David (Byrne-guitar, vocals and he writes the songs) looking just like Tony Perkins in a permanent state of shock.

If the others are mildly hostile, my presence appears to cause David – a pathologically shy man at the best of times – chronic discomfort. Tense and nervous and unable to relax. Byrne exudes the mannerisms of a petrified rabbit transfixed in the beam of a car's headlights and waiting for the crunch.

After numerous false-starts to the interview, the band eventually realise that I come in peace, ▶

PENNIE SMOITH

Growing in stature: the Heads in '78

July 15th, 1978 NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS Page 31

ALBUMS

TALKING HEADS
More Songs About Buildings And Food (Sire)

"THE DEEPER you dig, the more you uncover" — Nick Kent talks about "Talking Heads, '77". *"Things are entirely what they appear and, behind them, there is nothing* — Jean-Paul Sartre in Nausea, '32. *"It takes a lot of time to push away the nonsense. I've heard all I want to, I won't listen any more"* — David Byrne on "Talking Heads '77".

I STUMBLED across the mystery girl last week. She's in the bottom ten of the Top 50, I believe, with the best single ever made. It's called "Shame" and it's on RCA.

Her name is Evelyn "Champagne" King and I don't know what she looks like, where she's from, if she thinks . . . she's probably a pretty, tuppenny ha'penny Muppet parroting a pair of murky discompposers (Fitch and Cross, anyone?). Nevertheless she has manufactured a monument in the history of music, and said monument was practically wedded to your turntable.

So, substituting the latest Talking Heads sculpture for this beauty, the media may have felt like Marilyn Monroe losing Joe DiMaggio for Arthur Miller; slightly trading in the Yankee Clipper for the scribbler. Actually losing Talking Heads genius for the flying intellect.

[illegible] phenomenon of Talking Heads (using '59 [illegible] and the Big Apple [illegible]) — and [illegible] cynical side-concepts I have to share space. Talking Heads call themselves after the US television expert for a hand-and-machine experiment, that making themselves [illegible] and in need of explanation to the English bafflement. Talking Heads are blinding you with words and, to a lesser extent, with their melodicity — in all the other American new wave bands are so heavily doing their stuff. French girls, Ramalamas, and new American [illegible]

/ You won't see nothing like me" "It does not make a person such as mother over, it sounds more like Buchanan-Turner Overdrive trying to figure out "Prairie Rose".

"With Our Love" is nothing more than an easy way to get from A to C. "I look out the window and I call that education / And I see all my friends nothing out there and / I call that education."

Byrne may feel that evading people is the only way to hold their interest, and he may well be right. His calculatedly obtuse complexes and angles attempt to steer clear of standard rock excuses for places by plumbing the dubious depths of a style extant in American junk literature for a lifetime: the great William Burroughs cut-up twitdit.

The first record wasn't really like that. It was a pounding record. Love, lust, love. David's kicked the habit now, the luck. His songs increasingly get the reaction of the first album's unsophisticated "Psycho Killer", attempt mission, achieve invitation. Byrne, before sounding too supercilious to be supercilious, now sounds like Bryan Ferry and Lou Reed's top-of-form offspring — especially on the paired chorus "Out Of The Blue" that is "Warning Sign". "Warning sign warning sign / I hear it but I pay no mind / Never my voice hear my voice / It's saying something and it's not very nice."

There are just two good songs here. "Girls Want To Be With The Girls" and "Found A Job", both catchy tunes that appeal to a person's vanity. (She's rock and roll.) "Girls" is one of those raindrop times that should have taken the place of "Psycho Killer" on the first album: "Girls don't want to play like that / Just want to talk to the boys / Just want to do what's in their hearts / And the girls want to be with the girls."

"Found A Job" Street inserted, sullenly over a TV dance, Byrne playing the straw-jacket case of "Pulled Up". Elsewhere they perform Al Green's pinched "Take Me To The River", like people who've voted for the strong politician and just realised it. The much talked-about "Big Country" seems to me like a grossly sub-standard "Cruising LA" (More That's. It's long and whining, an artist type's worst's eye view of a healthy town: "I wouldn't live there if you paid me to!" bleats Byrne, the big pouter.

These songs are savagely, Manic in more uncharacteristic by music to make lists to. Music of a what you will, I've finished. Talking Heads need like more people and better entertainers than Television, Ramones, Mink De Ville and all, but I still put torch under my pillow, pull the chickens home, you know. I wish . . .

Pic: JOE STEVENS

The Heads at home — the blow wave starts here?

[illegible] — an school degree? And for all [illegible] after thought the [illegible] gets Talking Heads to do what some of his other friends would [illegible] at Byrne's hands. [illegible] optimistic tension of phrases starts sounding [illegible] dusty corners of a [illegible] Jonsville. Where [illegible] chirping, is small [illegible] punk band [illegible] good deal) did them cases and for all. Their songs are false as all hell, that's all, and David Byrne's much lauded whipped persona' songs sound like glove puppets with no hand in them.

Album starts off with the intellectual, hysterically funny [illegible]

my aim is true and that I hold Talking Heads in high-esteem. It subsequently transpires that the reason for their initial animosity was not JB [*Julie Burchill*]'s scathing review of their latest platter but the hysterical assurance given to them by a wizened *NME* stringer who shall remain nameless that my sole intention for doing the interview was to shred the Heads into news-sheet mince-meat.

"We nearly called the whole thing off," smiles Tina. "We thought we were going to hate you!"

Impossible, Tina. But while Chris, Jerry and Tina all open up and gladly become their warm, intelligent, trenchant natural selves, David Byrne's nerve-ends are stretched taut throughout the interview's duration and Talking Heads principal architect remains silently ill-at-ease.

"Nobody can think their shit don't stink," muses Tina philosophically.

EIGHTEEN HOURS earlier Talking Heads are on stage in front of a sardined-to-the-rafters packed-house at the Strand's Lyceum Ballroom and performing live is refreshing the parts of David Byrne's tortured psyche that normal conversation just can't reach.

Q'est-ce que c'est, psycho-triller? Fronting Talking Heads low-key, austere, *in puris naturalibus* visual, Byrne begins as jittery as he is in, well, real life; steadily gaining confidence as the show progresses and gradually building up to a peak of mesmerising intensity.

Eyes-roll, tongue-lolls in the sweat-soaked, screwed-up visage of a staid introvert who's mutated into a jabbering mentally unbalanced wreck, bobbing his head like a sulky Stan Bowles juggling a football in training after a particularly bad night at the dogs, his voice a whoooooshing haywire Hoover. Beautiful.

The irony of it all is that Byrne's song's share none of the slobbering rhetoric of all those rock bands bleating on and on and on about non-existent sub-stratas of society. More than any other musician, Byrne needs the cathartic therapy of performing live, but the bottom line is that he doesn't require it to promote the same old flabby flaccid fantasies as everybody else, but to put across songs about the major concerns of the average human being: loved-ones, work, home, civil servants, buildings and food. Lyrics pruned of any false embellishments, the bare essentials of everyday thoughts, dialogue and conversation that David Byrne himself finds so unbearably painful when he's not on a "Rock'n'roll" stage...

The multi-textured, full-bodied sounds of Talking Heads live is totally unlike the Jack Nitzsche-esque cold-eyed clarity of the Tony Bongiovi production on their first album, *Talking Heads: 77*.

Tina: "Bongiovi was working on Disco Star Wars [*Christmas In The Stars: Star Wars Christmas Album*] at the same time he was working on our record. There was a lot of record company pressure on him to make us sound 'good'."

Jerry: "But the sound was too weak, it sounded really thin on the radio."

David (in a rare moment of garrulousness): "At the time we thought we'd like to work with someone who was commercially orientated. We thought that if we were going in one direction and he was going in another it'd be some weird amalgamation of the two... I think Tony Bongiovi is one of the biggest assholes I've ever met. He was horrible to work with."

Chris: "You got it worse, David!"

The songs performed, from the second LP are more similar to their recorded counter-parts though they gain a stark, satisfying, abrasive quality on stage without the disc's mundane miasma of Eno with his putrid plethora of studio echo-chambers, tape-loops and a veritable battery of synths and sound filters.

Songs on the new album like "Thank You For Sending Me An Angel", "Stay Hungry", "Found A Job", "The Girls Want To Be With The Girls" and especially "The Big Country" are the equal of the infectious gems on *Talking Heads: 77*, though exchanging Bongiovi for Brian has merely exchanged the fire for the frying pan and for full appreciation of the band's modus operandi it's still necessary to catch them live.

In this environment they go from strength to strength, the joybringing power of their Lyceum date transcending even their classic, quasi-mythical UK debut over a year ago at Covent Garden's Rock Garden.

Under Byrne's high-pitched nasal vocal, the insistent pace of his 12-string splices with the distinct adornments of Harrison's keyboards and

PENNIE SMITH

Telecaster, carving out the insidious jagged melodies that twist and turn, cut and thrust, and are nailed down by the taut syncopation of the husband and wife rhythm section who put the FUNK into Talking Heads.

At home Chris and Tina spend many happy hours listening to the strident drive of the bass and drums deployed on the work of Munich Machine producer, Giorgio Moroder.

The overall effect owes much to Yellow Label Stax in general and an updated-for-the-'80s version of the nirvana experienced listening to Veda Brown's "Short Stopping" in particular.

And, apart from David Byrne's inevitable transition to theatrical epilepsy, they all look so... normal!

THE WAY we present our music was a reaction away from the distractions," remembers Tina Weymouth. "The high-posing macho, the costumes, the lights ... the lights changing in time to the music!" She laughs. "I consider that to be an insult to people's intelligence. So when it was time for us to go on stage we didn't know what to do except just present our music."

Talking Heads are the only band I've ever talked to who explicitly state that they're not out to make their audience feel inadequate, and who actually carry this through to their performance. Despite all the punk-posturing hyperbole, the majority of bands who have appeared over the last couple of years have been at least as willing to perpetuate and profit from the Star/Fan barriers as any Rolling Stones.

Mass-adoration, that's the name of the game, and each generation plays the game the same. And if you think that one of those pitiful pogoing stage invasions equals rock egalitarianism then you are a sucker, sucker.

But, of course, as Talking Heads grow in stature (their first album was on the American charts for 49 weeks and they're easily Sire's biggest-selling artists), their natural austerity is in danger of becoming the trade name they consider to be a must to avoid.

"I think we run the risk of our natural image becoming a cliché," mutters David darkly.

"You do wanna change, but how can you avoid that trap?" asks Jerry. "Damned if you do –"

"– and damned if you don't!" intercepts Tina.

Everybody laughs.

Aesthetically, I love Talking Heads. On a personal level I like them all enormously and would be proud to number them amongst my friends. On a professional basis, however, I like the songs on their new album but can't stomach Eno's production. Ol' Brian seems to have used the band as the raw material for his own production ideas. The Heads disagree...

"We got to the point where we'd done the basic tracks in just five days," says Jerry. "We'd rehearsed solid for two weeks before we flew down there to the Compass Point Studio in Nassau down in the Bahamas."

Why did you record there?

"Because the studio had the same MCI mixing desk that Eno had used for the latest Bowie and Devo albums, it was the only other one in the world that Eno knew of..."

Another reason for the choice of location, apart from the weather, was that it was a new studio which still had a few bugs in the system so it was possible to rent the studio by the week instead of the hour, fly all their equipment there and back and live down there for a month and the overheads of the album were still much less than it would have been if *More Songs About Buildings And Food* had been cut in New York or LA.

On the album sleeve Eno is practically listed as a fifth member of the band. He's certainly come on since the first time he met the band backstage at their Rock Garden gig and told them they were the most exciting thing he'd seen in two years (this is long before he was swapping fraternity pins with Devo, of course).

"David's not a scatologist. It's just that on the road your humour tends to be a little, uh, FAECAL!"
TINA WEYMOUTH

Jerry: "So after the basic tracks were down we had over three weeks to re-work all the songs and try out any ideas any of us had to make the songs sound different."

Tina: "Plus he had a real artist's attitude to technology."

Jerry: "With some of the people Eno had worked with I think they felt afraid to experiment beyond a certain point for being Eno-ised."

Tina: "Great!"

"No, I don't think that is great," retorts Jerry. I think that we felt our music was strong enough and that we shared enough views that it would be a great combination and I think that it does come through, it's definitely our music whereas maybe other bands Eno has worked with have been an extension of Eno."

"I think Eno's contribution was just like any one of us writing parts of the songs," opines Tina. "We all make the decision, and we ran into very few quandaries or conflicts when it came to decisions what to do..."

Oh, well. Talking Heads obviously have a deep empathy with you, Brian, so I don't mind you producing their next album or the one after that. In fact, you can keep doing it 'til you get it right.

DAVID BYRNE'S practice of adopting persona to put across a particular viewpoint inevitably results in rock's answer to Roald Dahl frequently contradicting himself in song. For instance, "I'm Not In Love" is the direct antithesis of "Who Is It?", "Uh-Oh, Love Comes To Town" and even "Stay Hungry", where the muscle-bound jock sweats blood to remain in shape and retain the affections of his steady. And in the sublime "Don't Worry About The Government" the subject wallows happily in comfortable bourgeois contentment while in "The Big Country" David's mouthpiece mordantly puts down the very same cocooned-but-cosy environment.

There is never the faintest hint of any bitter cynicism or moral castigation directed at the views expressed. Moral judgement is a luxury handed to the listener.

"People feel different things at different times," Jerry justifies. "We just do songs that express a viewpoint at a particular moment in time. We don't try to put out a manifesto or to have just one standing point..."

But whereas "Don't Worry About The Government" rings true, "The Big Country" just doesn't convince that you mean it, man.

The first time I heard the song I was at home in our tiny North London garret and the rain was pouring through the crevices in the ceiling and summer's here and the time is right for fumigating the cats' turd-box...

"I see the shapes I remember from maps/I see the shoreline/I see the white-caps/A baseball diamond, nice weather down there/I see the school and the houses where the kids are/Places to park by the factories and buildings/Restaurants and bars for later in the evening/I guess it's healthy, I guess the air is clean/I guess those people have fun with their neighbours and friends/Look at that kitchen, and all of that food/Look at them eating/I guess it tastes real gooood."

In a haze of euphoria I drifted away on the C&W steel-guitars, to sweet-smelling Marlboro County. Then Byrne's put-down punch-line brought me back to terra firms with a jolt.

"I WOULDN'T LIVE THERE IF YOU PAID ME TO!"

I don't believe you, David. You just made it sound too damn appealing! We all hoot with raucous laughter. Even David! I seize this opportune moment to ask if there is any truth in the rumour that he's a scatologist (a turd-fetishist to you ignoramus morons out there).

This is good-naturedly denied and David goes to the bathroom.

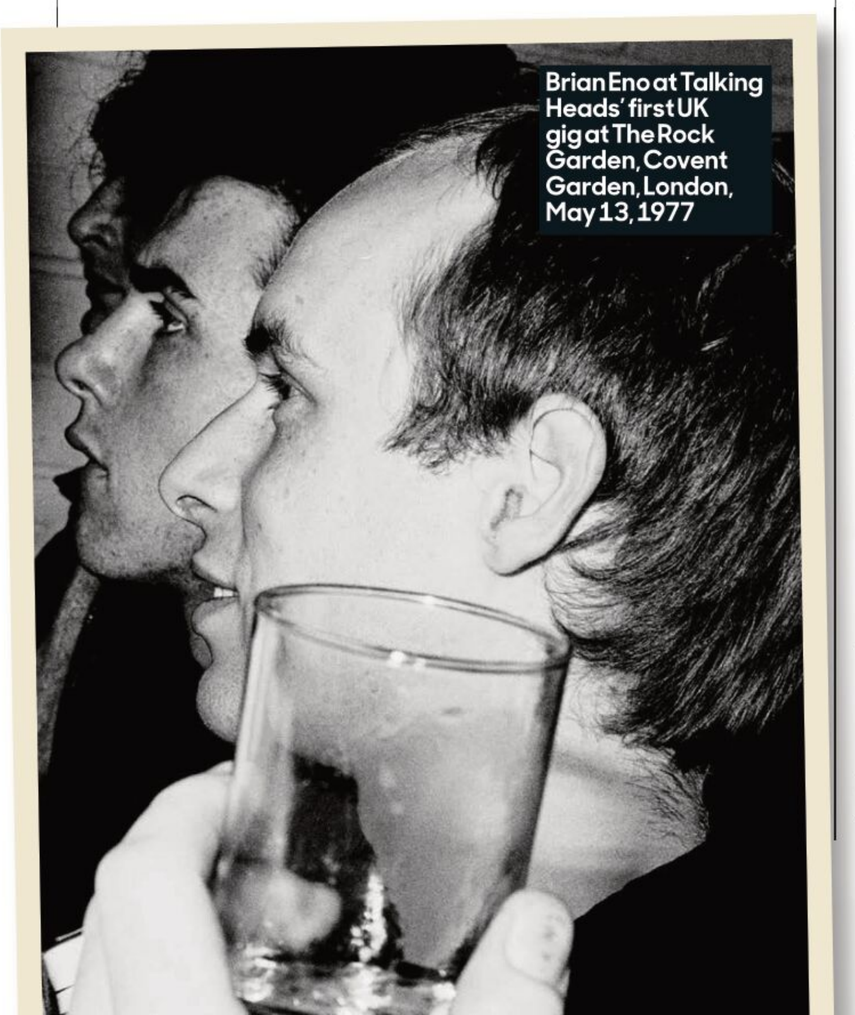
"David's not a scatologist," explains Tina with a grin. "It's just that when you're on the road your humour tends to be a little, uh, FAECAL!"

A short while later I get a practical demonstration of this coprolite whackiness when I go to the can to empty me bowels. One inch under the pan's water Elvis Costello peers myopically up at me from behind a camera on a tripod. I breath a sigh of relief when I suss it's only an 8x12 photograph and not the real thing.

When I come out and ask Tina if she knows what she's got floating in her carsey she says she doesn't and goes to take a look see. She returns with her ribs well-tickled.

"Did you piss on Elvis?" she asks me.

It was either that or let him take me picture. I look around for David Byrne. Of course, he's gone by now. ▲



Brian Eno at Talking Heads' first UK gig at The Rock Garden, Covent Garden, London, May 13, 1977

GUS STEWART/REDFERNS

FEAR OF MUSIC

RELEASED: AUGUST 3, 1979

Fear not! Eno and Afro-funk combine to make songs of spindly paranoia fit for the pop charts. BY DAVID QUANTICK

A WHILE BACK, the BBC showed a documentary about the future of African literature. The theme music was, unsurprisingly, a piece of swirling polyrhythmic ethno-funk. Perhaps more surprisingly, it wasn't a contemporary African musician, or anything African at all, but a 40-year-old song by an American band – "I Zimbra" by Talking Heads. Such, it would seem, is the association of Talking Heads with the music of Africa, an association that begins in earnest with their third album.

Fear Of Music, of course, is also Talking Heads' second album with Brian Eno and as such appeals to the head as well as the feet, with the self-egging duo of Byrne and Eno constantly pushing barriers. Tina Weymouth would later call this "the extra aggravation of Eno always trying to make something weird or saying, 'That's too ordinary, we have to do it this way to make it weirder'", but in this instance *Fear Of Music* works because of Eno, not despite him.

Despite what some of the (now corrected) songwriting credits might have said then, the album is very much a group effort. With tracks built on jams recorded in Weymouth and Frantz's loft, *Fear Of Music* contains some brilliant songs, but it's still a collection of grooves and sets out its stall early on with "I Zimbra", an artificial Afro-funk number full of snaking guitars from Byrne, Jerry Harrison and Weymouth, drums and percussion, and a lyric based on the tone poem "Gadji Beri Bimba" by dead Swiss Dadaist Hugo Ball. It works perfectly as a manifesto, a statement of intent and as a new direction for a band who had now abandoned the soul and R&B elements of their music for that of another continent.

Said continent being not Africa at all, but Europe, because *Fear Of Music* – its blank vocals drained of emotion, its post-punk rhythms creating the most bleached funk imaginable – is closer to the cold wave of Wire and Magazine than the warm grooves of Fela Kuti and Sunny Ade. The songs here deal with lack of affect, with psychosis, and with disorientation caused by drugs or war or even breathing, and are thus divorced from the emotional content of African (or even most other kinds of) music.

That's not to say this isn't a vigorously energetic album. "Life During Wartime", a hit single that never was, positively bounces along on its Tina Weymouth riff, with Byrne sounding for once briefly liberated, perhaps by the sheer joy of being on the run with no identity in a nameless war (it's also notable for a rare moment of lyrical empathy when he notes his companion is tired and offers to do some driving). It's a great song, despite the thin sound of the album, an Eno speciality at the time. "Cities" is a pop monster, a fantastically edgy comedy including snark about London ("a small city") and even a joke about Memphis ("home of Elvis and the Ancient Greeks"). John Lennon liked it enough to have it be a significant influence on Yoko Ono's "Walking On Thin Ice".

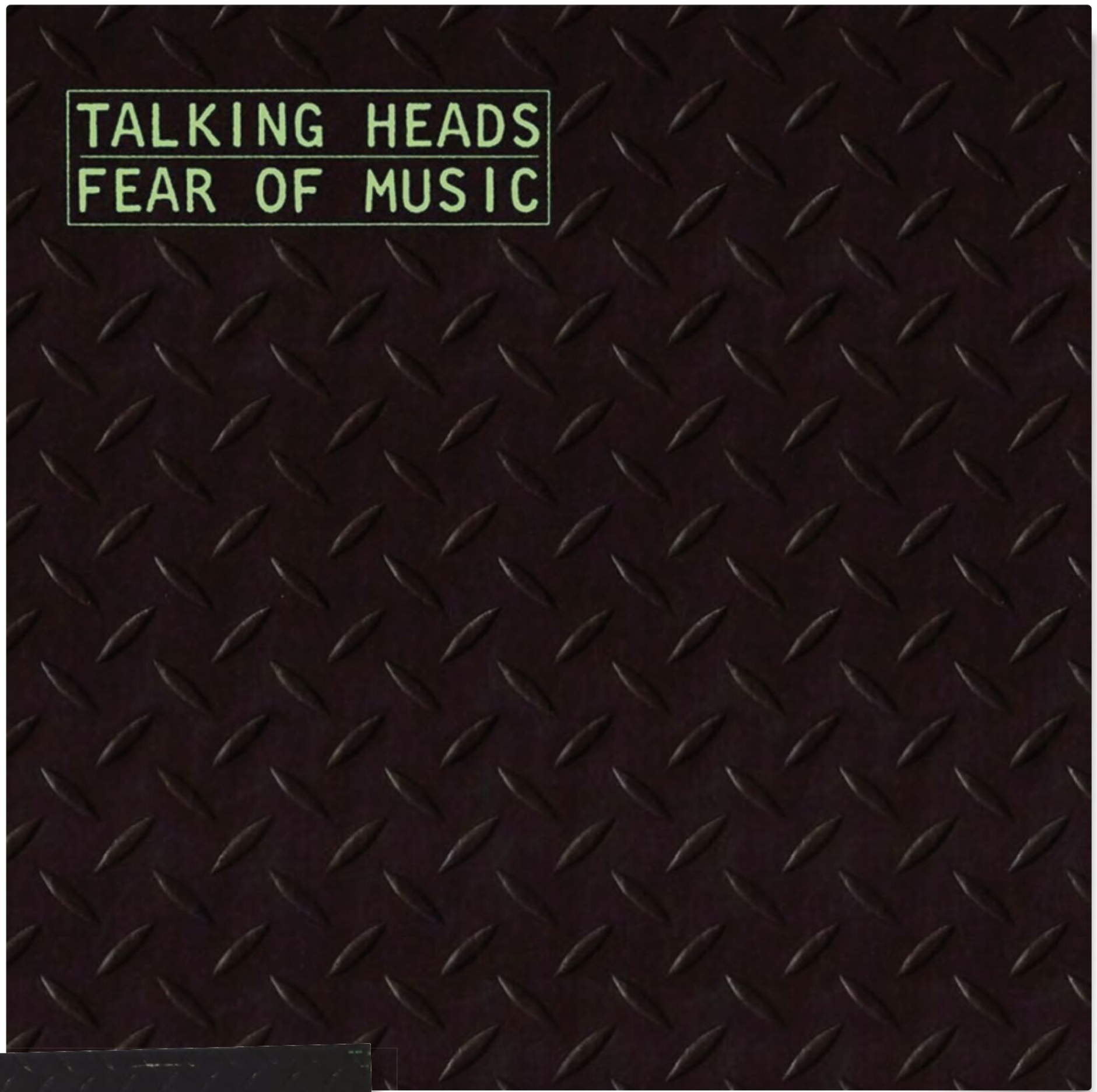
Oddly, for an album so often cited as a cheerleader for the shock of the new, *Fear Of Music* is shot through with the musical stylings of John Lennon and, to some extent, his old band: aside from "Heaven" with its Beatley jangle and Lennonesque cynicism, "Air" and "Mind" breathe cool menthol fumes into a white cube like something from *Imagine*, while "Memories Can't Wait" goes the whole hog with its "I Want You (She's So Heavy)" arpeggios.

WHAT THE listener notices most, however, is not the occasional Fab Four reference, but David Byrne's vocal persona. He'd always been one for dead-eyed observation, the anomie alien, but on *Fear Of Music* this character is at its most extreme, more sociopathic commentator than psycho killer, on a slew of curtly

CRITICS' VERDICT

"For all the criticism of his work on *More Songs...*, Eno's production here is exemplary, preserving the essentially live, dirty sound of the bass and cleaning up the top into a sharp, cutting edge."
JAMES TRUMAN, MELODY MAKER, AUGUST 18, 1979

"Byrne's voice has all its live mania and what used to sound tentative now sounds deliberately sly... This LP is unlikely to find such wide favour as *More Songs...* But it will have its partisans,. And they will have the usual amount of cerebral fun with Byrne's cock-eyed, alienated view of people's confusion."
PAUL RAMBALI, NME, AUGUST 18, 1979

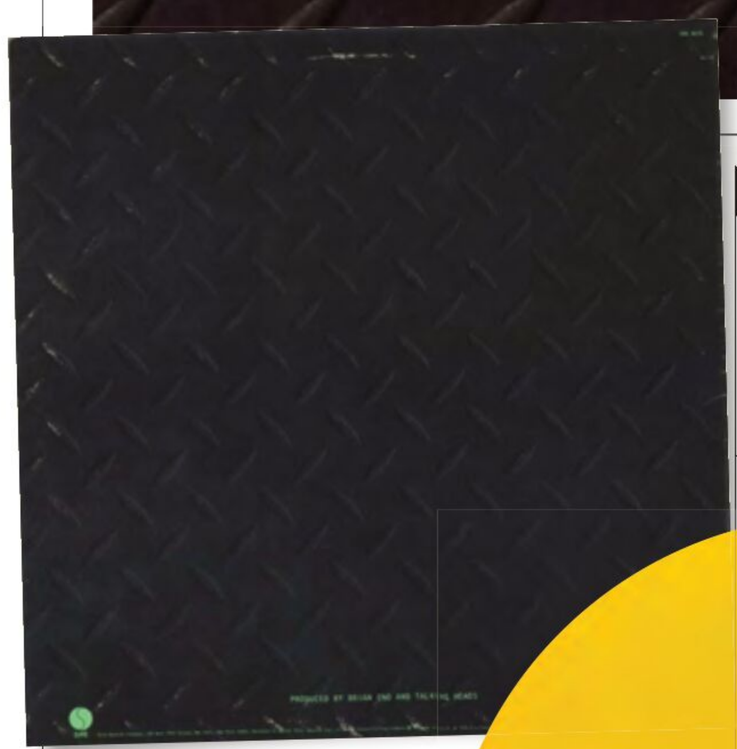


TRACKMARKS

1. I Zimbra ★★★★
2. Mind ★★★
3. Paper ★★★
4. Cities ★★★★
5. Life During Wartime ★★★★★
6. Memories Can't Wait ★★★★
7. Air ★★★
8. Heaven ★★★★★
9. Animals ★★★★
10. Electric Guitar ★★★
11. Drugs ★★★★

Label: Sire
Produced by: Brian Eno, Talking Heads
Recorded at: The Hit Factory, Atlantic, RPM, The Record Plant, New York City; Chris Frantz and Tina Weymouth's loft, Long Island City
Personnel includes: David Byrne (vocals, guitar), Jerry Harrison (guitar, backing vocals, keyboards), Tina Weymouth (bass, backing vocals), Chris Frantz (drums), Brian Eno (electronic treatments, backing vocals), The Sweetbreaths (backing vocals), Julie Last (backing vocals), Robert Fripp (guitar), Ari (congas), Gene Wilder (congas), Hassam Ramzy (surdo), Abdou M'Boup (djembe, talking drum), Assane Thiam (percussion)
Highest chart position: UK 33; US 21

ENO'S CONTRIBUTION, IN TERMS OF IDEAS AND SOUNDS, WAS INVALUABLE



titled songs: the hilariously unreasonable "Animals" (untrustworthy, by and large), the self-explanatory "Drugs" (which introduces the vocal sampling that would characterise Eno and Byrne's *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts*) and the aforementioned "Heaven", a song with a medley so gorgeous that Simply Red, KD Lang and Jimmy Scott are among the many people who've covered it.

"Heaven" is a beautiful song with a slow horror at its centre, namely that this is a place "*where nothing ever happens*". For the hyper-active, idea-riddled Byrne, it's hard to imagine a worse place.

Fear Of Music was a massive leap forward for Talking Heads: the tensions created by the division of the band into Byrne and Eno versus the rhythm section were, at this point at least, useful and healthy, and appropriate for a record that's so much about dissonance and paranoia. It established, deliberately or not, David Byrne as a dominant voice in the group, but it also gave Brian Eno a central role as well, which – as with David Bowie's band during the *Lodger* sessions – may not have gone down entirely well with the people who were actually in Talking Heads. That said, Eno's contribution, in terms of ideas and sounds, was invaluable, far more central to *Fear Of Music* than its predecessor and far less disruptive than it'd be to its successor. Not only that, this is an album whose influence, like that of so many records from 1979, was far greater than its sales: *Fear Of Music* arguably pushed post-punk music in a direction that was more danceable than punk thrash and more cerebral than new wave pop. It inspired an entire generation to throw away their safety pins and learn how to play spindly funk riffs behind blank songs about alienation. Before *Fear Of Music*, the paranoia was just in everyone's minds; now it was in the charts. ▲

Talking Heads go French, 1979

"I seem to be running around while everyone else is in slow motion"

Talking He ads descend awkwardly on the palaces and clublands of France, bearing the Eno-produced *Fear Of Music*. A real livewire onstage, shy and intransigent off, DAVID BYRNE proves prescient on "ethnological" music, the future of computer fraud and alternative humour. "I send myself up," he tells MAX BELL, "it isn't obvious humour; there are no knee slappers."

Tina Weymouth, 1979: "We used to look nervous onstage, but that doesn't show any more"

PENNIE SMITH

NME JULY 28, 1979

THE SCENE: Paris, France, July 10. Bastille Day looms, Talking Heads and their guests The B-52's have just completed a mini-European jaunt minus Great Britain. Tonight they played a concert of manic stature in the ultra-chic Théâtre du Palace before a packed house of 1500 well behaved and even better dressed French rockers – now people, night people.

After the show promoter Frederic Serfati has a party scheduled in a massive mansion on the Left Bank, in a residential/financial/cultural haven. The setting here on the Passage de la Visitation is pretty impressive, even by the bourgeois and luxurious standards of Paris.

This ain't no ordinary gaff: the entrance hall alone is stuffed with enough antique treasures to furnish the dreams of the most extravagant insolvent. Room after room reveals the splendours of a lifestyle which may not have changed one jot since the demise of the Sun King. Everything is renaissance, Louisian, rich and tasteful.

So what have we here, and who? Meet the president of Rolling Stone Records, Earl somebodyorother, who's holding court.

"You must, simply must meet him," one partygoer informs the world in general.

Feeling no pressing need to hobnob with such a luminary I stagger forward nevertheless, only to be bored stiff by the verbosity of a canny American businessman who fancies he's some kind of wit.

"Why is it that you British press chaps are always criticising The Rolling Stones?" he drawls, slightly the worse for drink.

Without bothering to wait for an answer Earl sways benignly then heads off. Meanwhile in the toot-up room, or one of them, highbrow scene makers jostle for nasal laxatives and lay out their lines on 18th-century glass-topped tables.

Now, into this divine and decadent soirée (and don't think I didn't enjoy it, 'cos I did) stumbles one of the stars of the show. Eyes right for the entrance of David Byrne, the lead figure in the Talking Heads psychodrama, an everyday story of collegiate city folk.

Tonight everyone must make his/her entrance with aplomb. Cindy, the B-52 with the Georgia Mushroom hairpiece and batting, wet eyes makes hers by slouching into the walled garden slugging on a bottle of Heineken. All around us lies the debris of the French vine, spouting vintage champagnes, elegant bouquets of Burgundy and scented Château Lafittes, but Cindy has her beer.

She may look decidedly unglamorous when set up beside the immaculately haute coutured and obscenely beautiful French belles, but for this undying devotion to the trash aesthetic Cindy wins tonight's star prize, a 10-minute chat with old Earl.

Still, the grand entrance is reserved for David Byrne, who recoils from the attention of his hosts with that characteristic neurotic dread of having to exchange small talk. Perhaps it's nerves then, or maybe it was the vodka I saw David imbibing in such liberal quantities earlier on, but here he comes, out of the door, across the path and SPLAT!

UH – OH! David Byrne just fell into a hole. His plate of goodies flies off at an angle, covering the shrubbery with pâté de fois gras and mayonnaise. Onlookers stifle their chuckles and David is helped to his feet by umpteen willing hands. He's slightly cut, half-cut, but the shock wears off.

Falling over gets you accepted, even in Paris, and the sight of Byrne's lanky six-foot frame spreading its length amongst the foliage is soon forgotten.

Later on he smirks: "I felt so embarrassed but perhaps that was what was expected of me, that I fall in a hole and spill food everywhere."

Byrne disappears for the rest of the evening to the kitchen, where else? Out of the gaze he proceeds to hit the bottle with a vengeance and converse with Kate B-52, a lovely person who can't get over "everything bein' so old an' all. I bet

this picture is real valuable, it's so pretty. Where can I git me a glass of water?"

David Byrne points her in the general direction of the taps and fumbles for a lychee.

By day this man is mild-mannered, polite and slightly distant. "I'm fairly shy, yes. Not too shy – but I don't start conversations with people I don't know, the others are better at that than me. I guess you could say that I meditate a lot, or just observe. Sometimes I watch TV or look our of a car window and I drift off into my world. I never was too gregarious."

CUT TO the final night of the Talking Heads' French sojourn. Another party has been thrown in their honour in the Parisian niterie, an underground disco called Les Baines Douches, formerly a public bath.

Impressions of Paris as a 20th-century throwback to the excesses of Ancient Rome are borne out by this club. Come on downstairs, where the sound system blasts out Grace Jones and Dillinger, and the well-heeled, high-brow post-punk kids are waking up for the late shift.

In one corner the complex Heads and B-52's manager Gary Kurfirst is shooting French pool, a bastardised billiards sans pockets, and knocking spots off the locals. Effeminate black boys smooch around the perimeter, blowing kisses. "Anybody wanna make some easy money?" Kurfirst is cleaning up.

A French groover approaches Byrne, who's perched on a wall, meditating. "You want to meet some nice French girls, oui?"

Byrne: "Oh, err, umm, nooo. I wouldn't know what to say to them. Thanks all the same."

Hedwige, the former Queen of the Paris punks, a tall blonde with a Fred Perry shirt, is introduced quite po-faced with her erstwhile title. "I 'ave my own band now, eet's better than new wave."

On the dance floor a wild 15-year-old mademoiselle is frugging with total abandon. This is [*Eva*] Ionesco, a direct descendant of the legendary French playwright and author. Her microskirt defies the laws of gravity and even the cucumber cool French lads can't remove their eyes.

My companion tells me that Ionesco was once more beautiful. "When she was 12, 'er mama took some photographs of 'er nekkid, perhaps now she is a bit fat and crazy."

Two people, one of indeterminate sex, have got their hooks onto Byrne. There's a momentary flare-up, a lovers' tiff and whoosh, the girl partner sulks off to watch porn movies through the hole in the wall. Her friend stays put by the green inviting pool. "She is a transvestite, n'est ce pas," whispers my companion loudly.

Maybe it's the Jack Daniel's but I'd swear she just hitched her top down. A breast pops out and is casually tucked in again.

Byrne decides this is all too much and departs for the hotel to play his tapes.

> **"Even after three years I get physically ill before concerts. If I ate anything now I'd be sick"**
> *TINA WEYMOUTH*

LET'S FLASHBACK to the Palace. Some venue. Given that the French are hell-bent on enjoying the remainder of this century while they can you have to admit that their style is something else. It's style without the revolt, punk without the punch but with all the trappings fully developed, the sense of occasion, the night out.

Maybe these kids are bored with the high quality of their lives, maybe they feel guilty about their wealth, it could be that they lack a sense of purpose or reality. Or have they just got it right?

The political leaders of the western world are fiddling while their ideals burn, but these people are having fun while David Byrne.

If the edifices are crumbling, this decadence is the sure sign that the basic superstructure is fucked. But rather than worry about the consequences, get nihilistic and spit on their peers, the French are out to find a real good time.

EVEN AT a rock'n'roll concert there is a sense of civilised frisson. Life is one big party and everyone with a ticket gets in.

Outside a few hundred stragglers fight amongst themselves but ignore *les flics*, nasty vicious sadists with a license to maim. Inside the temperature is boiling. The B-52's have just whipped up the standing hordes to the state where underarm deodorant ceases to function and now Talking Heads are ready to deliver their repertoire.

The band has improved immeasurably over the last year. The never-ending journey into the American hinterland has honed up their act and sharpened their cynicism. Any one member of the group will admit that touring is getting them down.

Dig this schedule. Three months roadwork in the States was followed in May by the making of their third album, *Fear Of Music*, with producer Brian Eno, 11 tracks in 10 days. Then they left for Australia, New Zealand, and back to Europe. The day after this European trip Talking Heads were catching a plane back across the world to Japan, the mega yen market, a necessary extension of the thinking rock band's itinerary.

Pretty soon the Eastern bloc will open its borders to the western scourge. By 1984 there are going to be more potential concert halls in the world that ever seemed likely in the innocent '60s.

The Talking Heads are very much a part of this mad circus but at the moment they have retained sufficient integrity and independence to stay outside the soul-destroying arena circuit.

They have just renegotiated their Sire contract, are undoubtedly comfortable, but fortunately are not complacent. Having completed a fairly lacklustre set of festivals in Belgium and Denmark, they are primed to deliver the goods in a proper hall.

The nucleus of their set bears testimony to months spent on perfecting each song, and suggests a capacity for improvisation. Having spent two albums and three years working up the chops Talking Heads are fast approaching that magic moment when, hey presto, learning becomes an escape from technique and the pieces fall together of their own accord.

Tonight is a classic set, beginning with the staple diet of "Big Country", its lazy C/W diatribe set off by a ludicrously funky husband-and-wife backbeat. Then the opening of the rock star's secret journal, "Warning Sign" combining myth and truth – *"I've got money now, c'mon baby."* Ordinarily, the man wouldn't say boo to a goose but on stage he's transformed, a real live wire, a nutcase, an exposer of every frayed nerve ending.

Byrne's own performance is staggering. It encapsulates everything that seemed interesting in Bowie and Ferry all those years back and creams them with a totally original approach. His thyroid glands are pumping towards the red zone, danger level. What goes through his head?

"I get taken over by the live act. The adrenalin rush for me is complete. I seem to be running around while everyone else is in slow motion. It's exciting but frightening and wonderful. The only thing that disappoints me is when a crowd shouts out for the better-known songs – that's not likely to boost your opinion of an audience. But audiences will tire of the obviously manipulative stuff.

"My own perspective when I go to a show is I hate that pop star routine. I assume that our audience wants to be treated with respect. We made it a rule never to use artificial crowd responses. Then again we try and play in decent places – comfortable halls or clubs with good acoustics.

"Of course we don't always succeed. Sometimes the venues are far from ideal. The bouncers manhandle the audience when there will only be a few trouble-makers on quaaludes. Promoters tend to assume the worst. Because of a minority ▶

they mistreat the majority. I admit that a lot of times we end up playing in terrible places, but you just try your best."

This particular night there's no hint of an audience who've come for the hits. Instead they are treated to a daring set which includes the resurrected "Love → Building On Fire" ("We dropped that for a year, then realised we were missing it"), plus five brand new numbers from the August-scheduled *Fear Of Music*.

The quality of the band is apparent in ensemble playing that stretches beyond the narrow confines of quirky rock. Jerry Harrison coaxes all manner of weird, engrossing textures from his small arsenal of keyboards, conventional and synthetic. His rhythm guitar work, never more than effectively rudimentary in the past, has taken an appreciable step forward.

The innovations that the Harrison and Byrne axis have up their musical sleeve stamps the group as legitimate purveyors of a vibrant melodic understanding. They are ready to stand comparison with the champions of any age whilst possessing a custom sound as taut and delicious as prime Television.

And spare a thought for the extramarital thrills oozing from the Tina Weymouth and Chris Frantz rhythm section, funk as close as this being a real rarity in normal white terms.

Before the show Tina and a small party of the English-speaking contingent converge on a street cafe to while away her pre-gig blues. The diminutive blonde bassist chainsmokes her edginess into the distance, a bundle of wiry worry and stomach turning fear.

"Even after three years I get physically ill before concerts. We used to look nervous on stage too but that doesn't show any more, it's just the waiting that gets to you. If I ate anything now I'd be sick."

The pressure is greater tonight than usual. Talking Heads are in the invidious position of topping over a support band, B-52's, whose current star is so high in the critical eye that any amount of shoddiness due to lack of match practice seems to have been completely forgiven.

Ironically, Talking Heads enjoyed a similar license when they toured Europe with Mrs Ramone's favourite sons in 1977. Today the two bands are not in direct competition with each other but the tension of record company hype lingers in the background. The Palace is chock full of B-52's posters but not one Talking Heads poster. Little things like that can sap a band's confidence even before they've stepped on stage.

Talking Heads have also suffered some indignities at the hands of their New York counterparts. There have been riling episodes with Sire stablemates the Ramones over bill topping and dressing room status, Joey Ramone allegedly proving to be a particularly obnoxious and paranoid individual when any threat to his ego is at stake.

There again, the Patti Smith Band, once the doyens of the New York artistic clique, have done their best to sequester their position and shove it down their peers' throats. Tina lets slip tales of snubbing at the hands of Miss Patti Lee that don't bear repeating.

To their credit Talking Heads are not the kind of people to pull any such stroke on lesser known kin. The B-52's are afforded every courtesy they could wish for. When the audience takes them to its collective heart, the headliners don't adopt the "let's go out there and blow these novices offstage" rap. Instead they pay credit to their guests' ability to put the crowd in an up mood.

The band's dislike of a cushioned reception is most obvious in their handling of the best known numbers, "Thank You For Sending Me An Angel", "Take Me To The River" and the inevitably popular "Psycho Killer", replete with French chorus and singalong rock'n'roll lingua franca.

It's here that the hard work and sense of adventure pays off in spades.

While it would be easier to rest on the laurels of 'motions' performance, Byrne whips himself into a state of controlled frenzy that inspires his vocal

Byrne, baby, Byrne: Le Palace, Paris, July 10, 1979

PENNIE SMITH

nuance, his postured, jerky electric dance and his instrumental expertise, which now rivals that of Tom Verlaine for inflection and attack.

He moves as if brain and voice were slightly at odds with each other... watch him work the changes, dramatically and emotionally. Whoever said this band were cold or premeditated must have been brought up in the wrong rock environment. On the contrary, Talking Heads today are as involving, intriguing, and as plain danceable as any band on this planet. Period.

DAVID BYRNE'S hotel room is dominated by his closest travelling companion – a sophisticated tape deck stereo system that packs into a briefcase. Amongst his current listening selection there are tapes of the new Neil Young and Bowie albums, Steel Pulse, Ultravox and Kraftwerk, Berlin Zoo, Ennio Morricone and, of course, Talking Heads.

Byrne's bedside reading includes Dr Hunter S Thompson's *Fear And Loathing: On The Campaign Trail '72*, *Paris Métro* and *Actuel*, a French almanac for the '80s where the standard of imagery and the breadth of the articles puts any English magazine to abject shame.

Aside from these mental relaxants Byrne travels light. Two months' wardrobe fits into one holdall. He makes no distinction between on and offstage attire, preferring his familiar garb of sweatshirt, black trousers and sensible shoes to anything more flashy.

Despite this conservative, college boy clean-cut demeanor there is one aspect of his appearance which causes him pleasure. David Byrne evidently sets great store by his hair style, his grey flecked black straight hair is his most assertive superficial characteristic.

Facially, Byrne modulates through stages of chronic introversion to private, wicked thoughts and an openly sardonic cheeky grin with a hint of wolverine around the edges.

His speech is slow and checked by qualification as if the words were being weighed on a spring balance. Usually he tilts towards self-deprecation and irony, taking every question at face value and avoiding any hint of conceit or artistic justification.

Given the artificiality of any interview, the instant opinion and the discretion of the journalist, Byrne is quite at odds with the picture I had of him as a willfully oblique person. His assertiveness is greater than his internal solitude, even to the extent that when the interview is first mooted and other members of the band express a desire to attend he rebuffs them firmly – "No, I want to talk separately."

While the band zip down to Montmartre to shoot a photo session Byrne leaves me in his room to listen to the new album, *Fear Of Music*, a far remove from *More Songs*.... Lyrically, the material maintains Byrne's favourite device, the third-person narrator, but the subject matter is more advanced, moodier and abstract.

Many of the titles are simple nouns, "Mind", "Paper", "Cities", "Air", "Heaven", "Animals" and "Drugs" (formerly "Electricity"). Themes and styles are unfamiliar, save for the now recognisable group sound. The move towards complex rhythmic structures and the contrast of vocal idiosyncrasies with melodic texturing is immediately clear.

"The people who disliked what Eno did to the second album will probably dislike this one more," Byrne mutters with a grin. He picks up a Swiss Army knife and runs his thumb down the blade.

"See, they assume that it's all his doing. Every time they hear a weird sound it's 'Aah, there he is' – when a lot of time it's us, our ideas."

This sense of misunderstanding is a sore point, then?

"Well, people have missed the humour, or at least undervalued it; especially in the singing – I send myself up a bit. I have fun with it. Some of the quirky little things that end up on record I think are real funny – the first coupla times anyway. Jokes always wear off after a while. It isn't obvious humour; there are no knee slappers."

> **"I get taken over by the live act. The adrenalin rush for me is complete"**
> **DAVID BYRNE**

The first song, "I Zimbra", utilises an African rhythm, lush percussive effects treated by some spectacular synthesiser colouration. It's the kind of deceptively simple sound that Brian Eno experimented with on *Taking Tiger Mountain (By Strategy)* or "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" but with a more integrated, less self-conscious appeal. The vocal is a multi-layered nonsense babble, African Esperanto.

Towards the end Robert Fripp contributes a fragment of a solo.

Byrne has a selection of South African music with him, notably *Rhythm Of Resistance*.

"Some of that stuff is difficult to listen to. It's not something you grow up with. With the ethnographic records you have to concentrate to hear what's going on, and for me it isn't always easy. But with Fela... stuff like that, you know... just listen to it. It might be chants or something but it's no trouble, no sweat."

Byrne's interest in ethnic musical forms goes beyond the hip, elitist viewpoint, being both academic and practical. The title of the album, *Fear Of Music* was drawn from a technical book called *Music And The Brain*: "It has long sections devoted to musically associated diseases. There was a word with a long Latin title, a phobia that certain people have, a real fear of music. Any kind of music is obnoxious to them and they have to be sent to live in the countryside.

"It's such a contradiction of the attitude we have to music, that it appealed to me. The album is also a bit frightening; not shocking but spooky and melancholy. I enjoy it.

"It's my ambition to write some really sad songs but I haven't succeeded yet. People assume that when you perform a sad song you need to use some method acting to get it in the right mood. Actually it works the other way. If the song is well constructed it will cause the emotions.

"It's true that there are hardly any songs about relationships this time. Only 'Mind' comes close to being a love song. It's best to get away from them. I mean, I like a lot of other people's love songs but it's a horrible thing to have to sing about every night. Eventually, the subject becomes meaningless."

I put it to Byrne that he's been damned in the past by writers who assume that the lyrics reflect his own viewpoint, whereas they are often fictional devices, vehicles for all manner of contradictory statements.

It's obvious Byrne uses the stage as a platform for expressing many opinions which he'd be too reticent to say to a person's face. "I might express the ideas privately but not so drastically. In a song I can spout off an idea that would sound ridiculous in a conversation."

The best example of this on *More Songs*... was "Artists Only", which Byrne didn't even write. Predictably, some of our brethren took exception to the line *"I don't have to prove that I'm creative"*.

"A guy called Wayne Zieve wrote the lyric on that. I don't know anything about it. He was crashing at our place (the Byrne and Harrison residence) and he used to scribble messages on bits of paper and leave 'em round the room. I just liked that one so I wrote some music for it. Now he gets royalties, which spoils the effect somewhat.

"Generally, writers understand a bit of the band but they naturally focus on the lyrics, 'cos it's ▶

Sound check: Weymouth and Frantz

PENNIE SMITH

Life during tour time: Byrne, Harrison and French connections

PENNIE SMITH

"We were always anti-stardom. Where the Stones were sexy, we were frigid"
CHRIS FRANTZ

hard to write more than a couple of sentences about music – there's not a lot you can say about a guitar solo.

"As far as the band goes, they don't mind the words too much. They wouldn't mind writing but they're good about it. It's hardest for Chris and Tina when we're in the studio. They play and that's it. Brian (Eno), Jerry and me play with the mixing. Chris and Tina like to be around, but it gets boring after a while. That frustrates them..."

To avoid this inequality *Fear Of Music* was recorded in a mobile studio hooked up to the Frantz family's Long Island loft. The band rehearsed for 10 days, working up basic tracks, then recorded half the album in two days.

Most bands in Talking Heads' position would spend three or four months on a third album and a lot more money.

"Eno got back to London from Bangkok. I phoned him and he came straight over. He played less on this one than before, so though it's said he's like a fifth member he isn't there when we record basic tracks. It was my idea to be on our own, without a producer for a while; we did OK, we didn't fight too much.

"We made the record in two sessions on the mobile, and it worked better; it was more relaxing. Initially, we achieved a near live sound. There was none of that stuff with headphones and engineers and 'I can't hear the drums' nonsense.

"Of course we treated it with studio care. We spent a lot of the time sequencing tracks. I've never liked the variety approach where a band show how clever they are – y'know, following a ballad with a rocker, then a lush song. We try to group them for similarities. That sounds premeditated though; it was an afterthought."

One of the strangest songs on the record is "Animals", which starts off as an oddball paean to animal characteristics – *"Animals are pretty smart/They shit in the park/They see in the dark"* – until suddenly the listener realises the furries have taken over and they're not domesticating the humans.

"That was the last song I wrote. It was a conscious attempt to go back to the old style but it ended up more complex, it has a 7/4 rhythm or something... I don't understand. It's jerky but I can't play the guitar part and sing it live yet. I got excited when I wrote it, though. There are lots of lyrics I didn't use."

Byrne takes a childlike delight in his own words, which remove a lot of cryptic and sinister veils from his sub-conscious.

The most immediately evocative song on *Fear Of Music* is the most harrowing: "Life During Wartime", set in a fictional future, say tomorrow – when snipers on the streets and suburban guerrilla warfare are the norm.

Byrne reckons he's ready for the inevitable: "Living in New York you have to be. There will be chronic food shortages and gas shortages and people will live in hovels. Paradoxically, they'll be surrounded by computers the size of wrist watches. Calculators will be cheap. It'll be as easy to hook up your computer with a central television bank as it is to get the week's groceries.

"I think we'll be cushioned by amazing technological development and sitting on Salvation Army furniture. Everything else will be crumbling. It doesn't bother me too much but it isn't something to look forward to. Government surveillance becomes inevitable because there's this dilemma when you have an increase in information storage. A lot of it is for your convenience – but as more information gets on file it's bound to be misused.

"Electronic banking, where you never meet a teller or stand in a queue, is already common, and that system can only get more prevalent.

"A funny thing is that as computers do inventories the crimes may be fewer but are far more costly to the company. People can alter the programme, spin money off and go undetected for years.

"I read a book about computer crimes before I

left. For example, one guy printed up a number of fake deposit slips and hid them with the blanks they keep in banks for customer's use; they all had his personal number on. After three days in which people had been depositing huge sums of money into his account, he withdrew it and split. There was no way to catch him.

"Another person had a touch-tone phone hook up to the General Electric master computer in Los Angeles. He was ordering vast supplies of wire, cables, you name it, storing it in a warehouse then selling it. These companies are so huge they don't figure anything is up. Eventually he got too arrogant and tried to sell them their own gear back."

It's hard to know where Byrne fits into the framework of his own subject matter. Very few Talking Heads songs feature his first-person experience, and the lyrics tend to focus on observed relationships, clichés and generalisations. This may be a defense mechanism, an extension of his diffidence, but it is also a fine way of illuminating other people's foibles.

The fact that this is usually a novelistic or cinematic technique makes the songs that much more absorbing, although it tends to polarise listeners who recognise their own faults being mocked.

For someone so shy, Byrne has a genius for provoking a reaction:

"I've tried to write songs that are far from my usual point of view, about getting drunk and chasing after girls, but they're never successful. I don't think I can chase... See, if I use the third person it achieves distance. It's slightly humorous. It isn't always very nice.

"The songs 'Heaven' and 'Mind' are set in parties and bars, places where people get together, except in one of 'em the party is in someone's mind and they want it to stop. Eventually they decide they like it."

Byrne turns away to the wall, fiddling with a Camel packet and laughing manically to himself.

"One title, 'Drugs' is a psychedelic song. I like those '60s numbers where they try and describe the experience... They're stupid. There's a big resurgence of acid in Paris apparently. The people from the disco where we played go on huge acid binges, hiring trains and stuff. That's a little intense for me."

DAVID BYRNE grew up in Baltimore, Maryland, then attended the Rhode Island School Of Design in 1970, where he met Frantz.

In those days Byrne played violin and ukulele. His first rock band was The Artistics, cover version specialists who lasted as long as his college career. (Byrne dropped out, natch.)

He now lives in the Ukraine neighbourhood of Manhattan, the sort of area estate agents like to call "seedy but bursting with character".

"I'm from near Glasgow [*he was born there*]. Baltimore was quite similar – a lot of slums, rough. People don't have a very nice time of it. It's strange to go back to Glasgow... I still have a lot of aunts and cousins there – I get the feeling that things have never been a lot better there."

In the past Talking Heads' catalogue has been dominated not by sex or love, the usual boy-meets-girl routine that serves as brain fodder in the majority of popular styles, but by the work ethic. I wondered if Byrne saw the band as a job.

"Well, I don't think about being an artist. People assume there's a dichotomy whereby you either make commercial music or interesting music, but we go for both. I like to mix clichés from love songs and office jargon... 'take a week off', 'a job well done'...I've never had an office job actually. My experiences were all more menial."

Byrne makes one concession to the Peter Pan mythology of rock'n'roll. The people in his songs are always boys and girls, never men and women: "Even people older than me I never think of as men or women. I also tend to draw stereotypes. That annoys Tina. If I say, 'Oh, girls always eat puddings but boys prefer savouries,' she goes nuts."

TALKING HEADS in 1979 are in an intriguing position. Their creative and practical muse is at a peak but the demands on their attention span are getting too big. Both Byrne and Frantz, the original members, claim to have reached the watershed as far as touring goes. For the drummer this means a tolerance of the rock lifestyle which he began by despising.

"We were always anti-stardom. Where the Stones were sexy we were frigid, where Elton John was glamourous we'd be ordinary. Now I feel more sympathetic to those people. We didn't try to be intellectual or smartass but because of our college backgrounds people assumed we were cerebral. I find a fair amount of passion in the music, it isn't a mental exercise."

And for Byrne: "I'd like to be doing other things. Touring puts you in a rut. It takes up most of the year and the way it's organised you waste so much time. That bothers me more than anything else. You're there to play, but it only takes an hour to do that."

Wherein lies the threat to any intelligent band – boredom.

Japan, Europe, the Antipodes, the American wasteland... rock warfare goes on in all of them, capturing territories, spreading the message. Talking Heads have come out of the New York underground and lasted the course, the only truly new wave band from the area to do so.

Reality for the idealistic group means there is no standing still; expansion is enforced.

When they started Heads reckoned it would take them five years to make an album, just to get accepted. They were wrong, Byrne recognises the dilemma:

"The business is very self-conscious. A lot of it is terrible but it could be no other way. Anyone who tries to be naive these days is a fool. The 'innocent' rock band that isn't aware of the history and the mechanisms... these people are in a dream world. I know that most of it is just merchandise."

Last March Byrne contributed a short essay to *High Times* magazine titled "It Ain't Rock'n'Roll But I Like It", which set about revealing the techniques behind what we Westerners call "ethnic music".

Here are some samples you can apply to your life; they also give a fair indication of the Byrne modus operandi:

"There is a Chinese legend that the emperor Huang Ti 'ordered' the invention of music in 2697 BC..."

"The Pima Indians of the American Southwest believe that songs already exist and that the composer's job is to 'untangle' them..."

"In Japan there have been a number of recent popular songs that deal with the bribery of government officials by the Lockheed Corporation. A couple of titles are 'I Also Would Like To Get Peanuts' and 'Playing Innocence'..."

"In Dosso, Niger, there is an oboe-like instrument called the djerma that, when played by experts, produces sounds with phonetic equivalents that can be decoded as a message by a skilled listener. Sometimes these instruments are used to make fun of individuals, without their knowledge."

Next time you listen to Talking Heads bear this information in mind, especially the last entry, then see if you can answer this simple question: Why did the artist cross the road? That's right, "because it was there" is the answer. And I forgot to tell you, the best track on *Fear Of Music* is called "Electric Guitar". Maybe David Byrne is just fooling around after all. ▲

PENNIE SMITH

REMAIN IN LIGHT

RELEASED: OCTOBER 8, 1980

And you may find yourself emulating another part of the world. The Heads' final Eno album looks to Africa for rhyme, rhythm and philosophical answers. BY JOHN LEWIS

AFRICAN SOUNDS were all over the pop world in 1980. *NME* was writing major articles about Fela Kuti, King Sunny Ade and Mazembe. Adam & The Ants and Bow Wow Wow had co-opted Burundi drumming to thrilling effect. Killing Joke, Echo & The Bunnymen and Siouxsie And The Banshees were drawing from hypnotic West African drum circles. 23 Skidoo were creating counterfeit Afro-funk. But no white band explored Africa so rigorously – and with such gleeful, punkish inauthenticity – as Talking Heads did on *Remain In Light*.

The sessions – started in New York and at Compass Point in Nassau – were based around lengthy jam sessions, ften inspired by the big-band funk of Fela Kuti. Listen to the four examples that showed up on the 2006 reissues of the CD and you can hear bassist Tina Weymouth and drummer Chris Frantz heroically building up a low-volume funk fury while the rest of the band, along with multiple guests, add layers of overdubs to create a dislocated post-punk take on Afrobeat. But such transatlantic, cross-cultural currents are accompanied by a darker lyrical subtext that seems to interrogate the west's orientalist fascination with Africa; to question essential notions of nationhood and individuality itself, often similar to those explored in Byrne and Eno's *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts*, released shortly afterwards.

The album explores a loose trajectory. Side one is filled with cultural neurosis: the protagonist sings of a western world that is spiritually void, looking to Africa for nutrition ("*All I want is to breathe/I'm too thin*," declaims Byrne on jittery polyrhythmic Afrobeat opener "Born Under Punches"). On the furiously funky "Crosseyed And Painless" Byrne berates his physical awkwardness and the limitations of western rationalism: "*Facts are simple and facts are straight/Facts are lazy and facts are late*," he raps, stiffly, in the breakdown, a delivery that Weymouth would later parody on the Tom Tom Club's "Wordy Rappinghood". By "The Great Curve", the narrator has rejected western patriarchal society and launched into an eco-feminist paean to Mother Nature. "*The world moves on a woman's hips*," he yelps. "*A world of light, she's gonna open our eyes up*."

This frustration with western values reaches its zenith in "Once In A Lifetime", where the middle-class, middle-aged, Middle American suburban man starts to question his entire existence, turning instead to the nature that babbles, untapped, beneath him (replicated by Jerry Harrison's aqueous synth gurgles). On the imaginary African field recording of "Houses In Motion" the neurotic protagonist has gone wild, escaping 'civilised' society to walk into the wilderness, where he witnesses a man digging his own grave. By "Seen And Not Seen", he is philosophically musing – unmelodically and robotically – about how a man can have a face that he does not recognise.

But, if the heathen west is turning to the developing world for spiritual sustenance, the developing world wants none of it. "Listening Wind" (featuring Arabic-style horn flourishes from 'Fourth World' trumpeter Jon Hassell, a master of ethnological forgeries) is a harrowing account of Mojique, a North African terrorist who looks longingly to an age "*before the Americans arrived*". He resents the "*foreigners in fancy houses*" and decides to plant a bomb "*in the free trade zone*". Even 21 years before the 9/11 atrocities, it was shocking to hear a song that inhabited the pathological mindset of a bomber so fully that you almost empathise with him.

BY THE album's end, on the great-coated indie pastiche "The Overload" (allegedly based on press reviews of Joy Division, before anyone in the band had heard a note by them, but suspiciously similar to *Unknown Pleasures*' "I Remember Nothing") the joyous sense of cross-cultural exchange has vanished. As if guilt-tripped by accusations of 'cultural appropriation', the band jettison any sense of 'Africanness' and retreat into white, gothic, Anglocentric melancholy.

But, really, you'll probably enjoy the album more if you ignore this narrative arc. For all the cryptic lyrics, this is music you really cannot appreciate while sitting still. It is an album that

CRITICS' VERDICT

"Talking Heads' music has grown away from the taut structures of the first two albums, in pursuit of the directions suggested by 'I Zimbra'... Few albums this year have taken on so much as *Remain In Light*; no rock album since *Station To Station* has sounded so radical without deserting the mainstream it has to occupy if it's to be heard."
ALLAN JONES, MELODY MAKER, OCTOBER 25, 1980

"Talking Heads have attempted something enterprising and fresh – the signposts are clear enough to direct them into new spaces... an album of brave intentions and haunting textures."
MAX BELL, NME, OCTOBER 25, 1980

TRACKMARKS

1. Born Under Punches (The Heat Goes On) ★★★★
2. Crosseyed And Painless ★★★★
3. The Great Curve ★★★★
4. Once In A Lifetime ★★★★★
5. Houses In Motion ★★★★
6. Seen And Not Seen ★★★
7. Listening Wind ★★★
8. The Overload ★★

Label: Sire
Recorded at: Compass Point, Nassau; Sigma Sound, Philadelphia
Produced by: Brian Eno
Personnel: David Byrne (lead vocals, guitar, bass guitar, keyboards, percussion), Jerry Harrison (guitar, keyboards, percussion, backing vocals), Tina Weymouth (guitar, keyboards, percussion, backing vocals), Chris Frantz (drums, percussion, keyboards, backing vocals), Brian Eno (keyboards, percussion, guitar, bass, backing vocals), Nona Hendryx (backing vocals), Adrian Belew (guitar, guitar synth), Robert Palmer (percussion), Jose Rossy (percussion), Jon Hassell (trumpets)
Highest chart position: UK 21; US 19

has you swaying your head, playing air drums and stomping your legs. Part of this effect has been achieved by identifying the hypnotic elements of Afrobeat. Eno, for instance, describes the rhythmic complexity of "Once In A Lifetime" being the result of him thinking that the 'one' of the four-beat bar was in a different place to the rest of the band. "It means I counted 1-2-3-4 differently to them," he says. "It seems like a ridiculously technical detail, but it's crucial. It means the song has a funny balance, with two centres of gravity, their funk groove, and my dubby, reggae-ish understanding of it. It's like how Fela Kuti songs achieve transcendence by having multiple rhythms going on at the same time, warping in and out of each other."

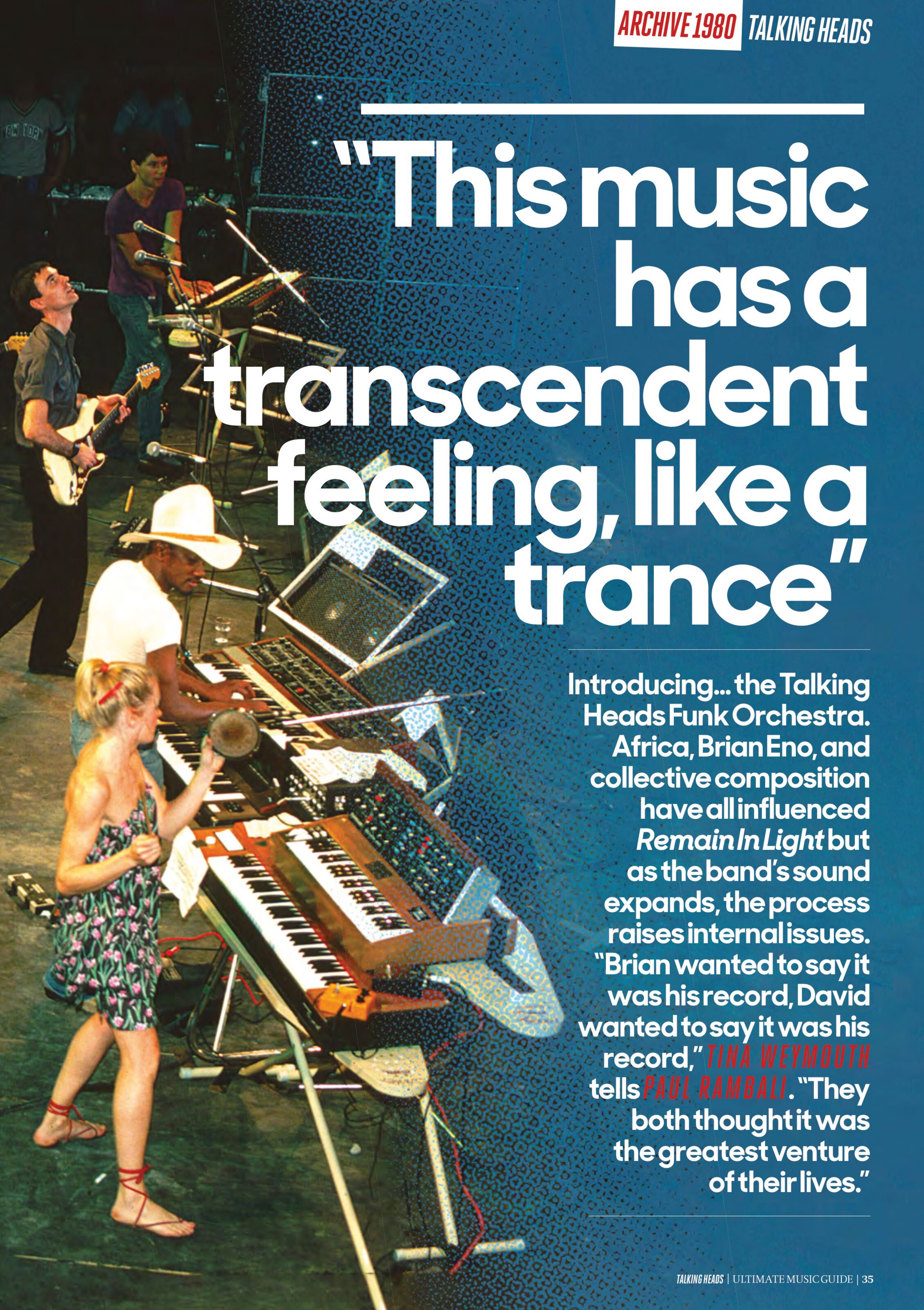
According to Weymouth, there were at least five separate bass parts being overdubbed on "Born Under Punches" alone, each playing a series of syncopated jabs, slaps and burps. There are several guitar parts – an itchy, jagged rhythm part, a wobbly lead riff that sounds like it's being played on rubber bands, and a solo from the 2:43 mark that sounds like it's being fed through every effects unit in Compass Point. In fact, the band used so much overdubbing that, in order to perform the album live, they required a Funkadelic-style mini-orchestra, with the "Expanded Heads" featuring keyboard player Bernie Worrell, second bassist Busta Jones and vocalist Nona Hendryx.

IT HAS YOU SWAYING YOUR HEAD, PLAYING AIR DRUMS AND STOMPING YOUR LEGS

The Top 20 status of "Once In A Lifetime" partly rescued the album in the UK, but it was the band's worst seller in the States. Despite this, *Remain In Light* seems to consolidate its place in the rock canon with every passing year. It's been rerecorded several times in its entirety: Phish do a faithful live funk version; Beninese singer Angelique Kidjo provided an imperiously regal Afrobeat reading; while Mystic Bowie's Talking Dreads took it in a reggae direction. Every track has been covered, by such luminaries as A Certain Ratio, Peter Gabriel, Franco-Malian duo Electro Bamako and Brazilian Girls. "Once In A Lifetime" alone has been reworked by the disparate likes of Earth Wind & Fire's Philip Bailey, Jimmy Nail, the Smashing Pumpkins and Weird Al Yankowic; even Kermit The Frog performed a suitably baffled reading on a 1996 Muppets reboot.

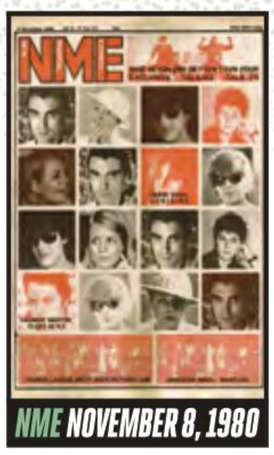
It is an album that sounded futuristic in 1980 and still sounds futuristic in the 21st century. *Remain In Light* redefined pop music and set the coordinates for a global pop realm that thousands of musicians are still exploring, four decades on. ▲

Central Park
Wollman Rink, NYC,
August 27, 1980



"This music has a transcendent feeling, like a trance"

Introducing... the Talking Heads Funk Orchestra. Africa, Brian Eno, and collective composition have all influenced *Remain In Light* but as the band's sound expands, the process raises internal issues. "Brian wanted to say it was his record, David wanted to say it was his record," TINA WEYMOUTH tells PAUL RAMBALI. "They both thought it was the greatest venture of their lives."


NME NOVEMBER 8, 1980

LOS ANGELES is the entertainment capital of America. In little more than 50 years, the business of entertainment has built a vast, moneyed urban sprawl around the billboards that line Sunset Strip announcing the latest records and films. Most of the people who live here either work in the entertainment business, or else they clean up after it.

A city like this, which is not really a city at all but just 72 suburbs in search of a city, is bound to have character problems. America views Los Angeles and the rest of southern California with apprehension. Southern California, for its part, seems to have renounced the rest of America.

Even for a country that regards politicians as being almost by definition corrupt and self-serving, the level of interest in the imminent elections is absurdly low. The one solitary note of political support I've seen in the streets was a customised van with a bumper sticker advocating something called the Libertarian Party...

"Beer drinkers," according to David Byrne, a New Yorker whose job has taken him all over the world. "They want to make everything legal, abolish taxes, and just have a good time."

Byrne recently rented a house in Venice, an "artists community" by the beach, while he and Brian Eno worked on an as yet unreleased album called *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts*. Venice is a centre of what *Wet* magazine calls "responsible hedonism", which is a sort of intellectual version of the roller-skating fad. Rollers-skating is just one of the fads that originated in this vanguard city. And Los Angeles is a vanguard city.

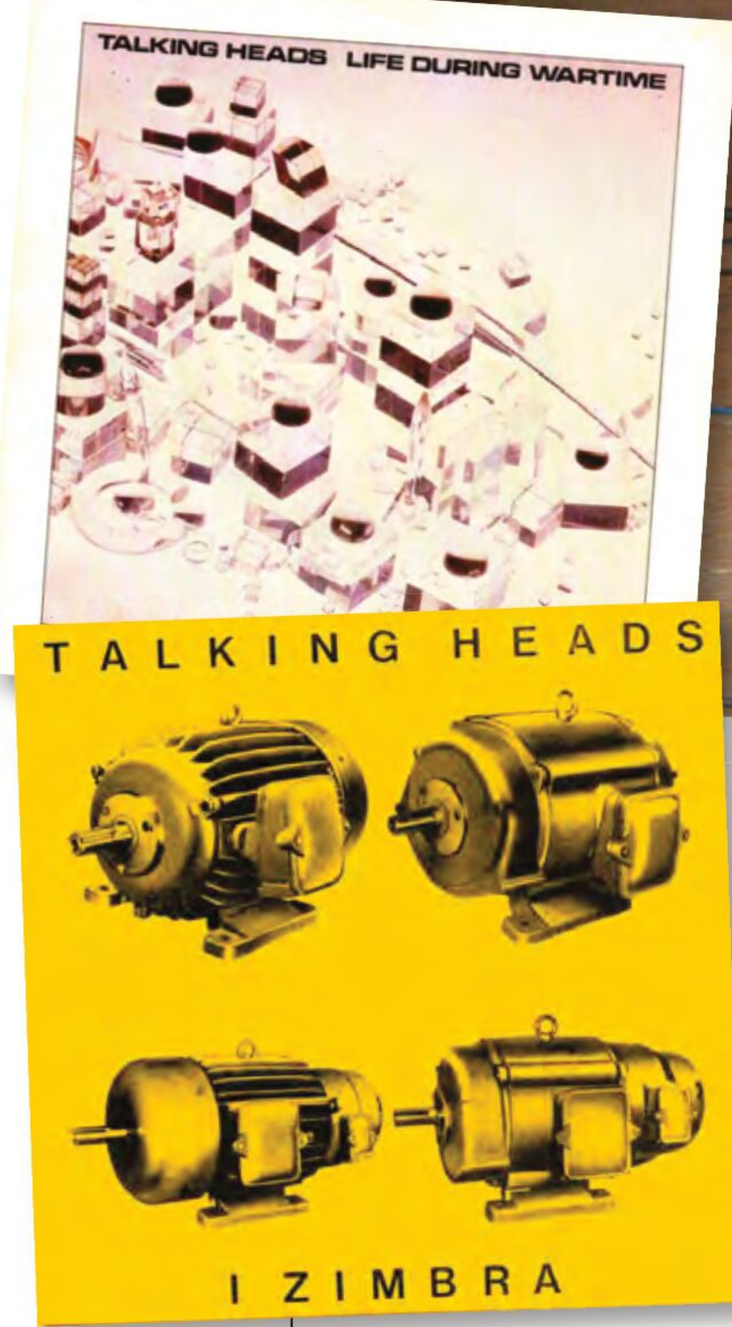
The LA art/punk crowd like to think that there's something vital going on here, and there is, but it's everything they despise. LA is the centre of contemporary American culture, broadcasting through films and music the blueprints for contemporary ways of life; little parcels of clothing and attitude for consumers starved of real sustenance.

David Byrne had to move out of Venice after just two weeks. It didn't suit him.

"Everybody was just relaxing in the sun all day, tossing frisbees around..."

And in the land of the laidback, naturally, the automobile is king. Cars outnumber people in the City Of Lights, and the parking lots outnumber the buildings. California is the last outpost of the West in more than just geography. Even the youth culture runs on gasoline.

Every Saturday night, Hollywood and Sunset Boulevards are bumper to bumper with youngsters cruising in their personal automotive sculpture – some of them Low Riders, the custom suspension job favoured by Spanish gangs of the Barrio. As simple a proposition as going to see Talking Heads play at the Greek, an open-air theatre in the middle of a large park in the Hollywood hills, would be out of the question with only a pair of heels.



There being virtually no public transport and few taxis, you would have to miss the first engagement on the first tour by the new Talking Heads Funk Orchestra. But don't be too disappointed. By the second and third performances they had improved a great deal.

The new Talking Heads Funk Orchestra is the same as the old Talking Heads with the addition of Adrian Belew from David Bowie's band on feedback guitar, Busta Jones, once of Sharks, on fatback bass, Steve Scales on percussion, Dolette McKay on vocals and Bernie Worrell from Funkadelic, whom you might say has swapped P-funk for F-punk, on keyboards.

The result is a nine-piece Talking Heads, lush instead of brittle. It's probably the single most radical step so far in the progress of America's so-called premier new wave band. Even a new wave band has to move with the times. Talking Heads have finally gone 2-Tone!

ELEVEN MONTHS ago, when they played the last date of their last tour in London, the group was on the verge of apoplexy. They had been touring eight months out of the year for the previous four, and were almost wrung out with the routine.

The working methods and approaches they had learned with Brian Eno had kept them fresh and stimulated in the studio and produced a consistent evolution on record, but on stage they had ground to a halt. They needed a new edge. Animated drum podiums and laser lights were not the answer. Anyway, David Byrne would probably just get arrested for vagrancy if he tried to take his shirt off onstage.

And so, for the first half of this year, Talking Heads, went on hold; Byrne went to Los Angeles, Jerry Harrison went to Philadelphia, Chris Frantz went to Jamaica, and so did Tina Weymouth.

While the Frantz-Weymouths were visiting Lee Perry and hanging out with Sly Dunbar and Robbie Shakespeare, debating who was the greatest rhythm section in the world, Jerry Harrison began working with other bands... The Escalators in New York, Double in Canada, and a French band who had supported Talking Heads in Lyon.

"They're actually quite good. They write songs about fucking in elevators," he says, nonchalantly.

"Really, that band we have now is the result of the work I did with other people. I had met Busta Jones and he called me up to play with The Escalators. Then we went down to Philadelphia and I produced some demos for Nona Hendryx... I started moving around that scene in New York.

"I met Bernie Worrell through Busta – he played on Busta's album on Spring Records. Dolette had

LYNN GOLDSMITH/CORBIS/VCG VIA GETTY IMAGES

Live in Central Park Wollman Rink, NYC, August 27, 1980

sung on The Escalators album. Steve Scales, I didn't know. We found him through Bernie. And Adrian Belew we met when he was recording in New York with David Bowie."

Meanwhile David Byrne, being somewhat impressionable, became absorbed in Brian Eno's discovery of Africa. The two of them set off like explorers into the California desert to try to capture the feeling of the bush in the sagebrush. They failed, and had to resort to recording *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts* in a more prosaic setting, using "found vocals" from the radio as their bush of ghosts.

I don't want to suggest that Byrne is a vacillating lump of jelly without a mind of his own, but it's obvious that the even more impressionable Brian Eno made the running here. Byrne's interest in musical anthropology surfaced in a short piece he wrote for *High Times* soon after *...Buildings And Food*, and several songs on *Fear Of Music*, most notably "I Zimbra", bore an ethnic trace that pointed to the hypnotic swirl of words and rhythms that characterises *Remain In Light*. However, Eno, being the more systematic of the two, probably helped put the idea into practice.

The main spur for the idea was a book published in America last year called *African Rhythm And African Sensibility* by John Miller Chernoff. Byrne spends a lot of his time in books. When we met, he was reading a book called *The Role Of The Artist In Primitive Society*, which I suppose ours qualifies as... Anyhow, the idea is that music of the Third World provides a spiritual nourishment lacking from the popular music of the West, witness for instance the importance of reggae in our black community. Byrne wants Talking Heads to do what tribal drums do, but whether or not he sees himself as the shaman of the global village he didn't say.

I would recoil from the dryness of this exercise were it not for the fact that each of the members of the group bring something different to the picture, so it won't be so academic, and also the very idea of trying to do for white America what George Clinton and many other funk and soul artists have long been doing (often unconsciously) for black America seems almost unthinkable.

Then again, as the French magazine *Actuel* put in a headline for an article about Eno: *Les blancs pense trop...*

The whites think too much.

WHEN THIS band came together were you aware that it would probably be the only popular integrated band in America?

Byrne: "I thought that, then I thought there must be others, but they don't get recognised for it as much. There's a group called Wild Cherry, I think. Chaka Khan has some white musicians in her group..."

The white rock audience and the black soul audience rarely overlap in this country.

"That's true. I think for our audience, considering the kinds of groups they might go to see, we're a real exception. When we put the group together we didn't think of that, but it was obvious when it happened. We just chose the kinds of musicians that happened to be the most appropriate to what we were doing.

> **"When our music works you get the feeling: forget yourself and become part of the community"**
> **DAVID BYRNE**

Actually it's more than happened to be; a lot of it's in the nature of the sensibility implied in that music."

Well, Talking Heads have always been a funky band.

"Yeah, there's precedents for it in our previous stuff. But in the moments when this group really works, the underlying sensibility is very different from what it was before, a real radical shift. This music, when it really comes together right, has a transcendent feeling, like a trance of some sort.

"That's exactly what happens in traditional African music and other Third World music. It's something that isn't sought after in most pop music. We're aiming at something different, although some of the elements may be the same. When it works you get the feeling: forget yourself and become part of the community. It's wonderful, and it doesn't happen every night."

Does the rest of the group feel the same thing?

"I haven't talked about it with the others, although I know for instance that Bernie knows exactly what I'm talking about, though he might express it differently. It's a sort of funny thing to discuss... without coming on like a convert."

Do you feel any twinge of colonialism?

"As far as that goes...I realise that's a little bit of what we're doing, but I can't help it. That's some of the music we're most excited about. If it didn't originate out of a western tradition I don't feel I can be blamed for that."

Do you think it's possible to perform this function for your audiences?

"Yeah. Sure I do. It's possible. There's other people that do that kind of thing, but we've added other elements, the kind of lyrics I write and the kind of textures we use. But people like James Brown and George Clinton's P-funk... it's all based around that idea, they just use street language to talk about it. "For something to have the effect that it's supposed to have, it's not necessary to ▶

LYNN GOLDSMITH/CORBIS/VCG VIA GETTY IMAGES

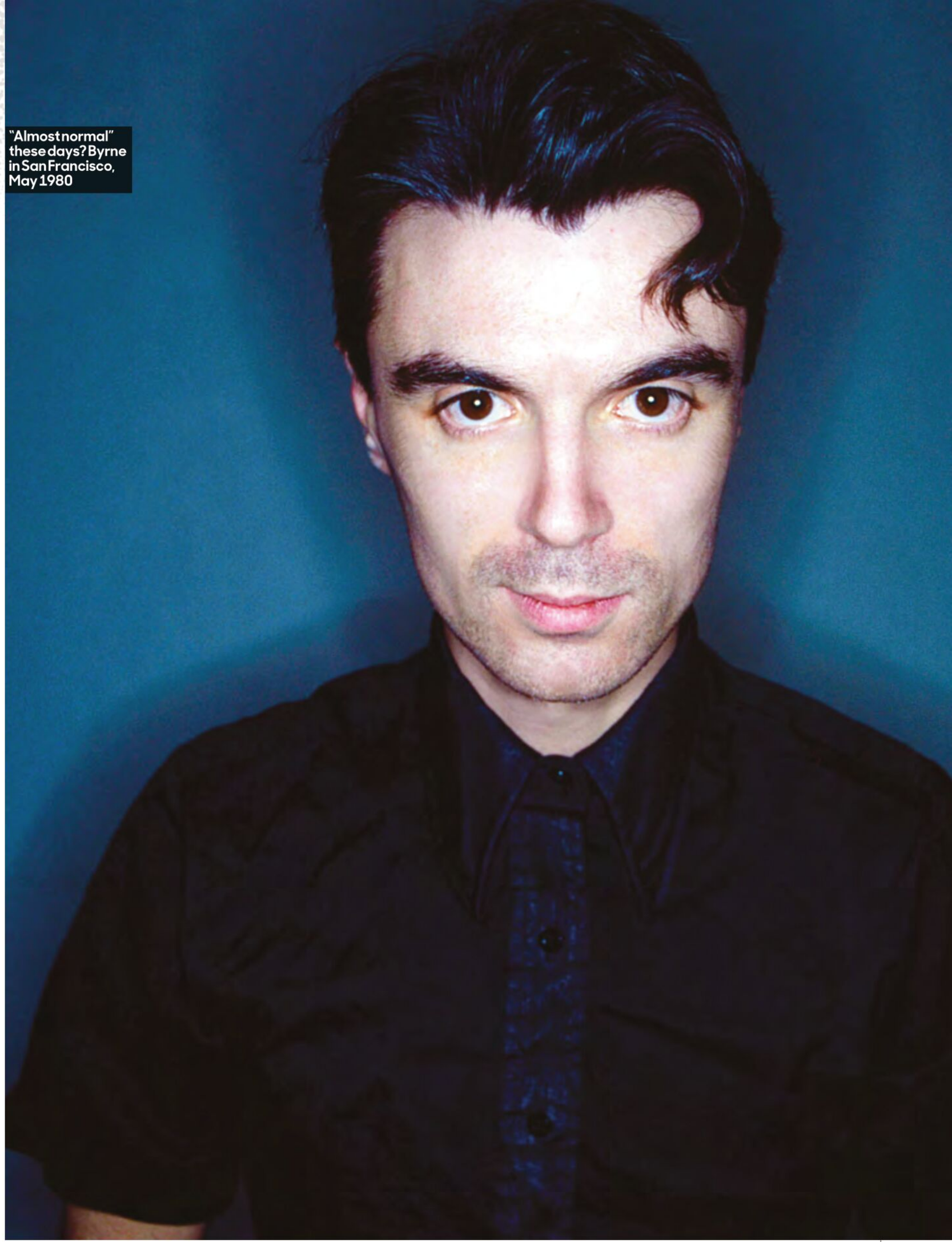
Byrne and Eno recording *Remain In Light* at Compass Point, Nassau, Bahamas, July 1980

understand all of it. I read in a book on voodoo that the structure of the rituals, the drumming, the singing, the chanting...the asymbolism of the rituals isn't understood by half of the people that are participating."

You mean like a church service or a heavy metal gig?

"Er, yeah. It isn't necessary for them to understand. I'm inclined myself to think about it, to try and understand it, but that's not necessary. And what's even more amazing I think is that it's not even necessary to believe in it.

"For instance, if I were to get involved in one of those things, I wouldn't have to believe in Jesus or whatever, I would probably just get carried away along with the rest of the people, which is really a testament to the power of those things. The feeling one gets from it isn't cathartic or purging, it's not that you let off steam or whatever, it's more like a mystical communion... And it's not some sort of psychological thing, it's more social in a way. The nature of that kind of music implies different parts and different rhythms, that all mesh...Not some sort of personal explosion, which tends to be what a lot of rock is about."



"Almost normal" these days? Byrne in San Francisco, May 1980

BYRNE HAS changed a lot in just the two years since I first met him. He's almost normal nowadays. Either he has come around to society or more likely society has come around to him.

Being photographed and interviewed is part of his routine, yet he still finds it hard to express himself in his own words. He answers questions slowly and painstakingly, quoting indirectly from books a lot of the time. It's his particular misfortune to have become a popular introvert.

He accepts the role of the head Head without too much complaint. Yet if Talking Heads is still the democracy it was, it's not without duress.

I was taken aback to hear Byrne blithely admit that he hadn't talked about his feelings towards their new music with the rest of the group. Maybe he's just like that, and their internal balance is stronger than it seems, but someone who saw the new band on stage in LA was moved to remark that it looked as though Byrne had got himself a new band and forgotten to get rid of the old one, a suggestion all four of them shrug off.

"I think Jerry puts it best," says Tina Weymouth. "When we were discussing this record...Brian wanted to say it was his record, David wanted to say it was his record. They both thought it was the greatest venture of their lives. We were saying, 'No, we all had the same idea,' but Jerry said, 'No, we didn't all have the same idea.' We all came in with different ideas of what we were going to do. It was the collective influences that created the result. No-one could put an individual claim to it.

"Certainly we were listening to African records long before David and Eno were because Chris and I are into rhythm, and it's great rhythm, primarily. We turned them on to it. We'd already done that song 'I Zimbra' and I felt sure when we did that – we actually did two like that, but 'Dub' didn't get onto the record – I felt sure that would be the direction of the next record.

"Plus, Eno had always said that he wanted to go into the studio cold with us, without any material, so that we could learn the way he makes albums, simple things layer upon layer. It's really not novel at all, it's just the old idea of jamming, one key, no chord changes... and everybody played and everybody produced. The songs were written by the five of us."

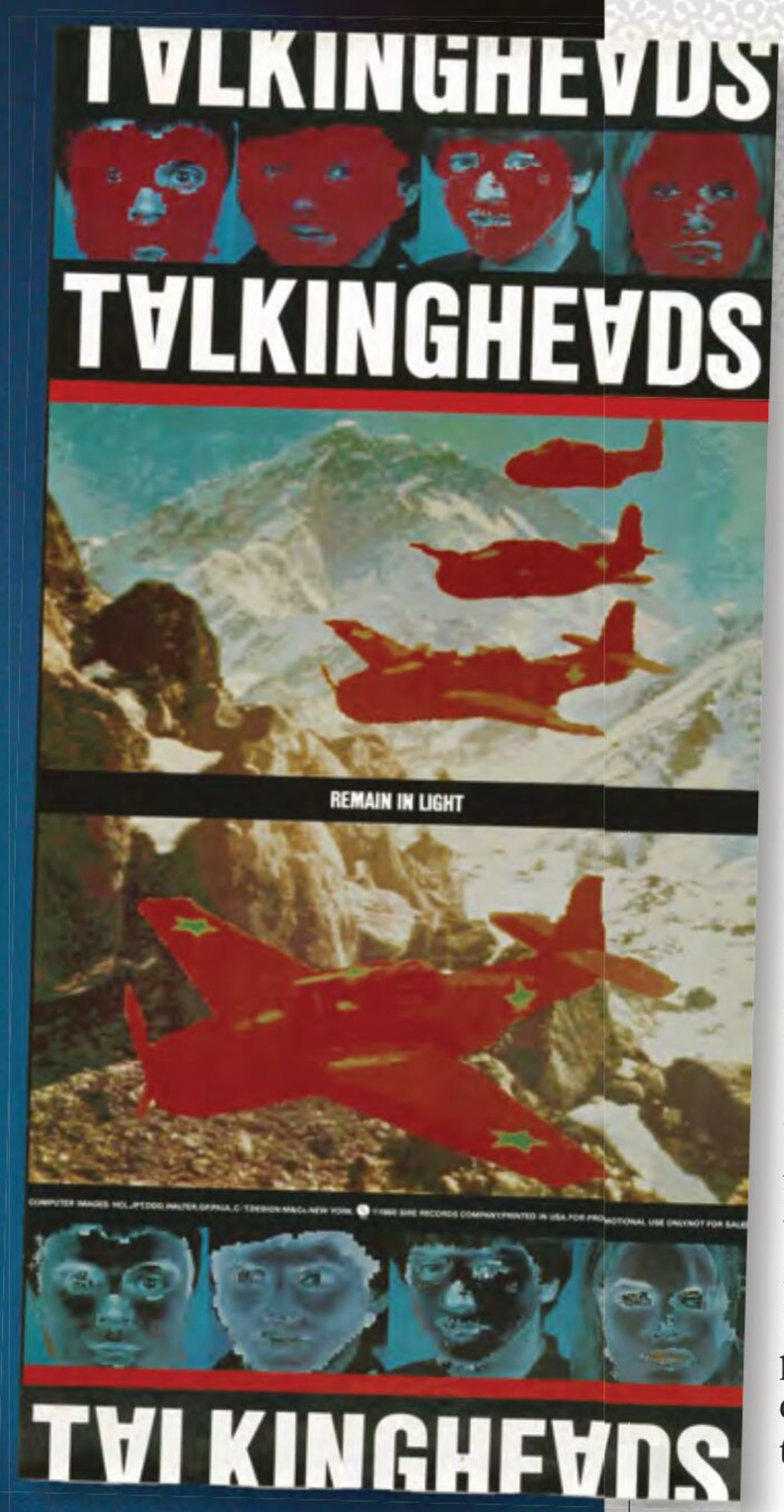
"Yeah," agrees Chris Frantz, "but there's a mistake in the text on the first pressing of the record. On the next pressing the credits will read; Lyrics Byrne with the exception of Byrne/Eno two songs, music by Byrne, Harrison, Frantz, Weymouth and Eno. We just had to put our foot down and say, 'Look, we don't just want to get paid a percentage or whatever because money is...' let's face it I'm not worried about money. That's one of the luckier aspects of my life. Had I never been in Talking Heads I wouldn't be worried about money. It wasn't that, it was for the record. I wanted somebody to know that even if I didn't write a whole song I made a contribution...

"It wasn't an administrative error, it was an error by a member of the band who is used to taking credit for everything that happens. And when it was put to him that this was not the right way to do things he had to admit that it wasn't."

"David does not come to the band with a full-blown song," says Tina, as always at pains to explain things fully. "He comes with a riff, maybe, if that, maybe nothing. The whole band puts it together and then David writes really terrific words. I really love his writing. He's so good at it and it's something he won't give up as long as he's singing the songs because he feels he can sing them with more conviction if he knows what they mean.

"After the first two albums, which with a couple of exceptions were essentially written before the group ever went on the road, before even Jerry joined the group... Jerry wanted a little more credit even though all he was contributing was a part or an arrangement. But it could be like, say, in the case of 'Life During Wartime' where it started out with just bass and drums, which seemed to fit with something Jerry and David

AARONRAPOPORT/CORBIS/GETTYIMAGES



had been working on before.

"That was one song where it was quite clear to at least three of us in the group that we had all written the music, and David had written the words, and we were getting royalties on the parts that we'd written! So we said with this album it has obviously been written by everyone, including Brian, and we should break with the tradition of singer-songwriter in the credits because that's not the way it happened.

"But I think that it's not... a big problem. I feel weird talking about it because it's like a family's dirty laundry, but it's not a huge conflict. David needs to have a lot of credit; that motivates him. And it's not a bitter thing. What you wrote in that review of *Fear Of Music* made it sound bitter, but it's not."

LET'S LEAVE it at that. The future's flexible. Logistics are such that the extended band will have to dismantle at the end of this tour. Eno probably won't be working with them on their next LP, which I humbly suggest they should do on their own. "Eno taught us to relax in the studio," says Tina, "which I think was his intention all along. He found that we were very willing to be experimental, as he was, and he was delighted with that... to find a band that would allow him to race everybody's track and not get artistically sensitive and precious about it.

"And I think we've done it, now. I told him that I always envisioned doing a trilogy with him, and once we'd done this studio album, that would be the end of our collaboration. He said I think that's quite right, and probably we won't be working with him again, although, hell if I know who we would work with..."

Remain In Light is, as others have pointed out, a transitional album. Talking Heads keep making transitional albums. But they follow a certain path. It's hard to believe that four years ago they willingly let producer Matthew King Kaufman try to turn them into the perfect bubblegum band on a set of demos that have since been lost. "And they were really good, too," says Tina...

If the rock'n'roll cult of personality they once claimed to want to disgrace has come to surround and frustrate them, they've at least learned how to live with it. They have their triumphs – this new band is one – and they have had their effect.

It's almost commonplace now but can you recall how extraordinary it was even in '77 for a band to have a female member who actually played an instrument? But like a lot of people I know, Talking Heads have simply found out that theold rock routines they wanted to break could break them first.

"Lee Perry says he's not doing screwface music anymore," says Tina. "In other words, political messages. He says music comes from love. And I think that's really true because one thing you find when you're working with a lot of different musicians is that they have a particular attitude, no matter where they come from or what colour or religion they are. It's very different from that of new wavers, who usually aren't especially musicians; except that people like us who started out being called new wave have since become musicians.

"Nowadays it seems very funny when you read interviews and there's a new group who are afraid of success or afraid of learning to play their instruments, or afraid of becoming heroes and all of those things. It's very hard to relate to because at this point I relate better to people who just appreciate music and who just love to play, and that's their only motivation. It's not a rebellion against something anymore and it is kind of a closed world, but it's honest.

"When I was in art school, somebody once said to me that the problem with you young artists is that all you want is to be famous. When you get older you realise that what's important to you – and Ralph Steadman, the cartoonist said this – what becomes important to you is the charm of the activity. You live for the work, not for the money or fame. The success that is obvious to someone else is much less obvious to you."

> "I certainly like getting recognition for what I've done"
> DAVID BYRNE

DOES IT annoy you to be regarded as the head Head?

Byrne: "I enjoy it. I don't want it to get inthe way of everybody being able to work together. But I certainly like getting recognition for what I've done."

Have you fulfilled all your ambitions as they were say five years ago?

"Yeah, I guess so. Five years ago I thought it would take us a lot longer to be as popular as we are now."

Do people still see you as an outpatient?

"Yeah, probably, but less than they used to."

Do you still feel like one?

"No. Much, much less than I used to." ▲

JOESTEVENS

Tina Weymouth sets it straight: "David needs a lot of credit"

TOM TOM CLUB

RELEASED: OCTOBER 1981

Locked out of the solo album love-in, Frantz and Weymouth go their own way. Specifically, to the Bahamas, creating a coffer-filling urban pop classic with covert intentions. BY ROB HUGHES

UNLIKE DAVID BYRNE and Jerry Harrison, who both decided to undertake solo projects after *Remain In Light*, Tina Weymouth and Chris Frantz had no intention of making an album together. That's until their accountant alerted them to the sorry state of their bank balance. But Sire chief Seymour Stein refused to bankroll a third offshoot from Talking Heads, citing lack of funds. And the alternative – ad hoc session work for whoever might need a decent rhythm section – held little appeal.

As Weymouth admitted later, the creation of their own band came about "solely to support me and Chris, to put food on the table", at least to begin with. Old friend Chris Blackwell, who'd missed out on signing Talking Heads to Island back in the day, dangled a carrot. He'd offer the duo his Compass Point studio in the Bahamas to record a single, and if he liked what he heard, he'd green light an album.

Inspired by their regular downtown haunts in New York clubland, Weymouth and Frantz contrived to make "something unpretentious and downright funky for our friends to shake their asses to", explained Frantz in his recent memoir, *Remain In Love*. Persuading Lee "Scratch" Perry to serve as producer was a major coup.

Once settled in Nassau in the spring of 1981, Weymouth and Frantz moved into a small apartment behind the studio that the latter christened Tom Tom Club. Alas, Perry failed to show up for recording. It was left to the couple themselves to oversee the process, along with young Jamaican engineer Steven Stanley.

The frisky song ideas that followed, particularly rudimentary sketches of what became "Wordy Rappinghood" and "Genius Of Love" (the former given heft by a big kettledrum that Frantz had found in a local music store) sounded promising. Weymouth's sisters, Laura and Lani, were flown over to add their voices. Recalling old skip-rope chants from their schooldays, the siblings' free rhymes gave "Wordy Rappinghood" a focus and identity. Tina rapped out verses about the mechanics of language – "*Words in papers, words in books/Words on TV, words for crooks...*" – with a guileless simplicity that only added a fresh layer of cartoonish charm. When Stanley brought in T-Connection guitarist Monte Brown, the song frothed into a freestyle funk-pop delight. Blackwell was thrilled.

With its itchy keyboards, tri-ply vocals and playful cross-rhythms, "Wordy Rappinghood" set the template for the album. "Genius Of Love" took its cue from "More Bounce To The Ounce", a recent club hit from electro-funksters Zapp that balanced relaxed grooves with raw edges. The track had been co-produced by Bootsy Collins, one of several key figures that Weymouth paid tribute to in the lyrics. "*I'm in heaven/With the maven of funk mutation*," she sings, almost dreamily. "*Clinton's musicians such as Bootsy Collins/Raise expectations to a new intention/No-one can sing/Quite like Smokey, Smokey Robinson/Wailin' and shakin' to Bob Marley/Reggae's expanding with Sly and Robbie.*" There's even room for a croaky impression of James Brown.

Namechecking the rhythm section of Compass Point's house band was a neat trick. During a break from recording Grace Jones' *Nightclubbing* in the room next door, Sly and Robbie agreed to call in and add handclaps to those of Weymouth and Frantz on "Genius Of Love". Also invited onto the song was Adrian Belew, Talking Heads' auxiliary live guitarist, whose skittery chords are tempered by Monte Brown's sure, calypso-ish groove. According to Frantz, Robbie Shakespeare was sufficiently enthused by the final mix to say: "Man, bus it straight to Paris! This is a hit!"

WEYMOUTH AND Frantz made the most of having Jones in the adjoining studio. Her percussionist, Uziah "Sticky" Thompson, injects "Lorelei" with a vaguely stoned, otherworldly rhythm. By contrast, his work on "As Above, So Below" gives the song a slithery feel that

CRITICS' VERDICT

"Tom Tom Club music is powerful and pumping without ever degenerating into thrash, it's intelligent and witty without becoming some cute cerebral parlour game and it combines a lot of wide open spaces with a continuous series of events not to mention a continuous flow of ideas. Tom Tom Club make exceptionally elegant use of shifting textures over solid rhythms: change plus continuity.... *Tom Tom Club* is a fair facsimile of the knees of the bees. Despite the fact the cover is hideous, I'd be ashamed not to say that I loved it."
CHARLES SHAAR MURRAY, NME, OCTOBER 3, 1981

TRACKMARKS

1. Wordy Rappinghood ★★★★
2. Genius Of Love ★★★★
3. Tom Tom Theme ★★
4. L'Éléphant ★★★★
5. As Above, So Below ★★★★
6. Lorelei ★★★
7. On, On, On, On... ★★★★
8. Booming And Zooming ★★★

Label: Island
Produced by: Chris Frantz, Tina Weymouth and Steven Stanley
Recorded at: Compass Point Studios, Nassau, Bahamas
Personnel: Tina Weymouth (lead vocals, bass, keyboards), Chris Frantz (drums, keyboards), Adrian Belew (guitar), Monte Brown (guitar), Tyrone Downie (keyboards), Uziah 'Sticky' Thompson (percussion), Lani Weymouth (vocals), Laura Weymouth (vocals), Loric Weymouth (vocals), Benji Armbrister or Kendall Stubbs (bass on "Genius Of Love")
Highest Chart Position: UK 78; US 23

suits its darker mood. Weymouth's bass keeps low and steady; vocals are thoughtfully measured. The lyrics are a reminder that, for all its bubbling frivolity, *Tom Tom Club* is not without deeper dimension. Here, Weymouth invokes a seeker's spiritual journey, following the '60s hippie trail to the urbanite excesses of early-'80s club culture: "*Behold the door appears before you/Walk on through... Call the spirit of the symbol/Come to me/Allow the deity to guide you.*"

Similarly, "L'Éléphant" is a childlike tale, sung entirely in French, of an elephant and hippopotamus who decide to dress up as men and saunter over to the nearest village. Belew's distorted guitar effect mimics an elephant's trumpet, while another *Nightclubbing* sessioneer, Wailers pianist Tyrone Downie, adds an exotic keyboard line. While it might appear to be little more than a yé-yé novelty tune, it actually becomes an anti-war statement. The two creatures encounter people in tears, desperately fleeing "*the war of men/They have quarrelled among themselves/All around, they want to kill.*" The onlooking birds scold the elephant and hippo for adopting the costumes of human beasts. "We were definitely not trying to reach the intello-muso audience of Talking Heads," Weymouth reflected on the album in 1997, "but those songs are much more dangerous than they first seem."

FOR ALL IT'S BUBBLING FRIVOLITY, TOM TOM CLUB IS NOT WITHOUT DEEPER DIMENSION

Issued on Island ahead of the album, "Wordy Rappinghood" was a big hit throughout Europe, peaking at No 7 in the UK. By the time second single "Genius Of Love" had shifted over 100,000 import copies back home, Sire finally found the good sense to release *Tom Tom Club* in the US. It quickly went Top 30.

The great irony was that what started as a somewhat reluctant leap of faith, primarily to pay the bills, became a bigger seller than anything Talking Heads had released thus far. Or, for that matter, either of the Sire-funded efforts from Byrne and Harrison.

Its impact wasn't merely commercial. Anticipating the rap and hip-hop boom, *Tom Tom Club* proved influential for a new generation of artists. "Genius Of Love" alone would be sampled by the likes of Grandmaster Flash, 2Pac, Busta Rhymes, NAS, Ol' Dirty Bastard, Ziggy Marley and Black Eyed Peas. Rather than a one-off sideshow, Tom Tom Club were definitely here to stay. ▲

THE NAME OF THIS BAND IS TALKING HEADS

RELEASED: MARCH 24, 1982

A coming-of-age onstage portrait of the artists as a young band, from new wave oddities to world funk jamboree. BY TYLER WILCOX

FOR MANY, the go-to Talking Heads live document is the soundtrack to Jonathan Demme's *Stop Making Sense*. And that's fair enough: even stripped of Demme's iconic visuals, the *Stop Making Sense* OST is a powerhouse, capturing the band at its tightest and most accessible. But *Stop Making Sense*'s in-concert predecessor, 1982's *The Name Of This Band Is Talking Heads*, is even better. It's definitely less well known; for a while there the double LP was a little hard to come by, only belatedly reissued on CD in 2004. That expanded edition, however, is the best argument for Talking Heads as one of the greatest live acts of its era, expertly tracking their rapid evolution from twitchy downtown minimalists to groove-embracing adventurers.

It was an unusual trajectory, to say the least. When Talking Heads emerged as a trio in 1975 as part of the fertile CBGB's scene, where Patti Smith, Television and the Ramones, among others, were turning a dingy club on New York City's Bowery into the centre of a rock'n'roll revolution, they stood out from their already strikingly original peers. In a live setting, Talking Heads were, well, weird.

In one of the earliest eyewitness reports on the band, *The Village Voice*'s James Wolcott grappled with Talking Heads' anti-stage presence: "Frantz is so far back on drums that it sounds as if he's playing in the next room; Weymouth stands rooted to the floor, her head doing an oscillating-fan swivel; the object of her swivel is David Byrne, who has a little-boy-lost-at-the-zoo voice and the demeanor of someone who's spent the last half hour whirling around in a spin dryer. When his eyes start Ping-Ponging in his head, he looks like a cartoon of a chipmunk from Mars." In other words, not exactly prime candidates to become the next big thing.

Unfortunately, *The Name Of This Band Is Talking Heads* doesn't feature any recordings of the group in their primal trio stage (the curious should seek out various audience tapes on the web). Instead, it picks up the thread after keyboardist/guitarist/erstwhile-Modern Lover Jerry Harrison joined. As the most seasoned musician of the bunch, Harrison added a little polish to Talking Heads' live act, but the earliest recordings presented on *TNOTBITH* remain thrillingly raw. The first disc of the expanded reissue features performances from 1977 through 1979 – a host of blistering renditions of songs from the band's first three records (*Talking Heads: 77*, *More Songs About Buildings And Food* and *Fear of Music*).

Out of the confines of the recording studio, Byrne emerges as one of the most unique and strange frontmen in the history of rock. It's as though he's inventing a whole new language on stage, one made up of terrified yelps, feral snarls, glassy-eyed croons and stuttering declarations. Check out the version of "Who Is It?", taped in Maynard, Massachusetts in late '77 and released on the 2004 reissue of the album; it lasts just one minute and 44 seconds, but it's a roller coaster of dread and confusion set to a peppy beat, a masterclass in alienation. Byrne's mannerisms may have been fully absorbed into the mainstream at this point, but it's hard to think of any precedents for his thoroughly bizarre vocal approach. What's most impressive is that it didn't result in something unapproachable; instead Byrne was able to make his eccentricities interesting – alluring, even.

It also helped that Talking Heads could be a killer party band when they wanted to. The band's overall oddness was balanced by a rhythm section who had an unironic love for dance music – Motown, Bohannon, James Brown, etc. They may have dressed like strait-laced college kids, but Frantz and Weymouth's bubbly vibes could get a crowd moving, even in the early days. On the live rendition of "Found A Job", the pair slink slyly under Byrne and Harrison's chicken-scratch guitars, creating a delicious locomotion. This ain't no disco, but it's close.

CRITICS' VERDICT

"The band has become thicker and richer with half a dozen extra musicians padding out the sound. Conversely, Byrne has shredded his messages of the ordinary into individual slices, repeating one line over and over, singing a verse off against another."
PAUL COLBERT, MELODY MAKER, MARCH 27, 1982

"Record One, the early stuff, is an inspired adrenalin rush through rock'n'roll heartland, while Record Two, the current incarnation, is an unwieldy funk steamroller that tends to stick in the morass of its own complexities"
GRAHAM LOCK, NME, APRIL 3, 1982

TRACKMARKS

1. New Feeling ★★★★
2. A Clean Break ★★★★
3. Don't Worry About The Government ★★★★
4. Pulled Up ★★★★★
5. Psycho Killer ★★★★★
6. Artists Only ★★★★★
7. Stay Hungry ★★★★
8. Air ★★★
9. Love → Building On Fire ★★★★★
10. Memories (Can't Wait) ★★★★
11. I Zimbra ★★★★★
12. Drugs ★★★★
13. Houses In Motion ★★★★★
14. Life During Wartime ★★★★★
15. The Great Curve ★★★★★
16. Crosseyed And Painless ★★★★★
17. Take Me To The River ★★★★★

Label: Sire
Produced by: Talking Heads
Recorded at: Northern studios, Maynard, Massachusetts, 1977; Capitol Theatre, New Jersey, 1979; Emerald City, New Jersey, 1980; Central Park, NYC, 1980; Sun Plaza, Tokyo, 1981
Personnel: David Byrne (vocals, guitar), Tina Weymouth (bass, synth, percussion, b/v), Chris Frantz (drums), Jerry Harrison (guitar, piano, keys, synth, b/v), Adrian Belew (guitar, b/v), Nona Hendryx (b/v), Busta Jones (bass), Dolette McDonald (perc, b/v), Steve Scales (congas, perc), Bernie Worrell (keyboards, b/v)
Highest chart position: UK 22 ; US 31

IT'S AS THOUGH BYRNE IS INVENTING A WHOLE NEW LANGUAGE ON STAGE

By the end of the 1970s, Talking Heads' ideas were getting big – too big for four people to properly re-create on stage (though they do a more-than-passable job with the *Fear Of Music* tracks at the end of disc one here). The Eno-assisted *Remain In Light* offered a heady swirl of sound full of ricocheting vocals, dense polyrhythms and layered melodies. As a result, Talking Heads' ranks swelled considerably on their 1980 tour – and it's that "big band" that we get to hear in all its technicolor glory on *The Name Of This Band Is Talking Heads*' second disc.

On paper, it's a curious collective. Former Bowie/Zappa guitar hero Adrian Belew contributed effects-laden squiggles. Parliament-Funkadelic's Bernie Worrell added his out-there keyboard wizardry. Vocalists Nona Hendryx and Dolette McDonald gamely matched Byrne note for note. And adding to the rhythmic mix, percussionist Steve Scales and bassist Busta "Cherry" Jones grooved mightily. It could've easily been an overcrowded mess. Instead it's the futuristic funk band of your dreams.

CHRIS FRANTZ recently likened playing with this lineup to "riding a fucking bronco". And indeed, the energy level is off the charts, whether they're leaning into choice cuts from the catalogue ("Psycho Killer", "Life During Wartime") or fresh *Remain In Light* material. The extended intro to "Warning Sign" is a terrific showcase for Belew, as he adds mind-bending dubby Echoplex action to the rocksteady descending riff, tunnelling merrily into the abyss. "Crosseyed And Painless", meanwhile, is a runaway train, Frantz and Scales locking in on an unstoppable groove, the rest of the players floating along in ecstatic union. And "Houses In Motion" is a dark, enveloping thing, with Worrell's textured synth work rising to the top. (It should be noted this group is as fun to watch as they are to hear; check out the Rome gig, usually available on YouTube.)

The Name Of This Band Is Talking Heads isn't just a great live album. It also manages to tell the story of Talking Heads' first several years in a succinct, totally thrilling fashion. Once you've listened to it, Talking Heads make perfect sense. ▲

"I think we're receptive to most things"

LUCIANO VITI/GETTY IMAGES

High times on The Name Of This Band Is Talking Heads Tour in Bologna, Italy, 1982

Talking Heads are diversifying. DAVID BYRNE is producing, and writing for dance. CHRIS FRANTZ and TINA WEYMOUTH ("she's pregnant!") have the Tom Tom Club. JERRY HARRISON has made a record. With a live album as a placeholder, and a new studio album yet to appear, is there a risk Talking Heads might not get things back together? "I don't have any plans," Byrne tells RICHARD COOK. "I wonder if we're becoming some sort of institution in a way..."

NME JULY 17, 1982

IN THE sprawling, strange universe of US music, Talking Heads exist as a point of absolute calm.

In the many epithets brought to their peculiarly and particularly American sound – art-rock, studied white dance, pilfered ethnic headgame, berserk neuroses under repression, crypto-observation of urban tensions – they have absorbed the welter of attention with a placid, self-generating certainty.

In a series of records that chart a line of ascent past the messy areas of broiling and howling invention surrounding their years together as a group, they have sculpted a clean, lucid gathering of ideas and functions; a packaging, a rationalisation; an art through refinement instead of debasement, a display of judicious selection and finely tooled manipulation.

Though they appear to have shed several skins. Talking Heads remain immediately identifiable as the group on the crisp little pop diagram called "Love → Building On Fire".

If you listen to that bony and symmetrical blueprint you can hear all the detail of Talking Heads already in place – in voice beat, measure and climate. They still play it in their live show. On the first of two nights at the huge Palais Des Sports gathering, it is their second song.

The Heads number eight now and they all contribute to spreading the song out until its folds let in a relaxing breeze; the military precision of the original blossoms into a swaying and luxuriant movement that accommodates the eccentric band spread of melody hidden inside and funks sweetly, caressingly to itself.

To itself. Even with all the ornamentation of added percussion, extra vocals and a steady confidence fashioned out of endless replays, the self-effacing, private chuckle of Talking Heads takes precedence. Checking the long litany of brilliant, bloodless songs David Byrne has set to the rhyme of Talking Heads' stable career of rock dilettantism – a kind of surgery for the mismatched twins of black rhythm and pop saccharine – is an odd experience.

Byrne tacks directly into the wind of his memories of pop music – hence their staple cover of the ancient infantility of "123 Red Light" now apparently dropped – and his exceptional gift for assimilating all those little nuances blends an elixir of vitality with the often utterly arid musings of "The Book I Read" through "The Girls Want To Be With The Girls" to "Houses In Motion".

Under a smokescreen of accusatory bubblehead pretend psycho criticism, Byrne sits unperturbed and re-organises his algebraic cut-ups into another set of shapes.

It is hard to imagine growing truly passionate over this music. The Heads' set opens with their anthemic "Psycho Killer", the embodiment of Byrne's contradictory rock. Again, they've re-thought the structure to suit an almost expansive way with the song's gesture towards a hot-blooded motorik drive – it gives space to the allure in the tune at the expense of any sense of a stricken mental state. Yet the shrug to the pre-supposed element of the song is quite in order. "Psycho Killer" is no less a cypher than "Cities" or "Once In A Lifetime". Its vacuum is perpetual.

Of course they're tired of these tags of gutless, cerebral dabblers – of course they are. And they are more than that.

As their Paris show demonstrated they've made themselves a very considerable live force. They take all the *Fear Of Music* and *Remain In Light* songs to their feasible limits – not so far – pushing their derivations of funk or third world beats to wire up songs composed mostly of badinage and often arbitrary clots of words and ideas that open or close as the preference takes them. "Drugs" (not played here, but present on their live record) is the only Talking Heads song conceived and executed as a studio track: the others are written to be played over and over. With only one new song in their familiar set it's maybe as well.

Behind all this efficient busyness the calm logic of Talking Heads is constant. The argument is not whether their borrowings are an emasculation of their source material; it is whether something singular has been made from this flux of options, whether it is more than a compartment of notions about other music.

And the question cannot finally be answered.

It's too easy to expel the mystery in Byrne's songs, which may be why he and the Heads always seem to be under-achieving. That he skirts issues and opts out of manifesto making and conventional emotional release – his Fear Of Music – is admirable on one level, and can count as an intellectual's suspicion of the straight statement. But Byrne's refusal to break cover weakens their endeavour. Pop music is a game for Talking Heads. Their love of riddle and mime notwithstanding, they will never break their own rules.

A lot of gossip has grown up over splits in the group, fuelled on the spate of solo enterprises and the long delays before a sequel to *Remain In Light* (its successor is still not yet fully recorded). In fact, the Talking Heads are probably as close as they've ever been. Chris Frantz, Tina Weymouth and Jerry Harrison depend greatly on Byrne's wit and hunger to push the Heads boulder; Byrne equally needs Weymouth's aggression and Harrison's patient mediocre rewards reaped by their solo records (Tom Tom Club apart) may have bonded them closer.

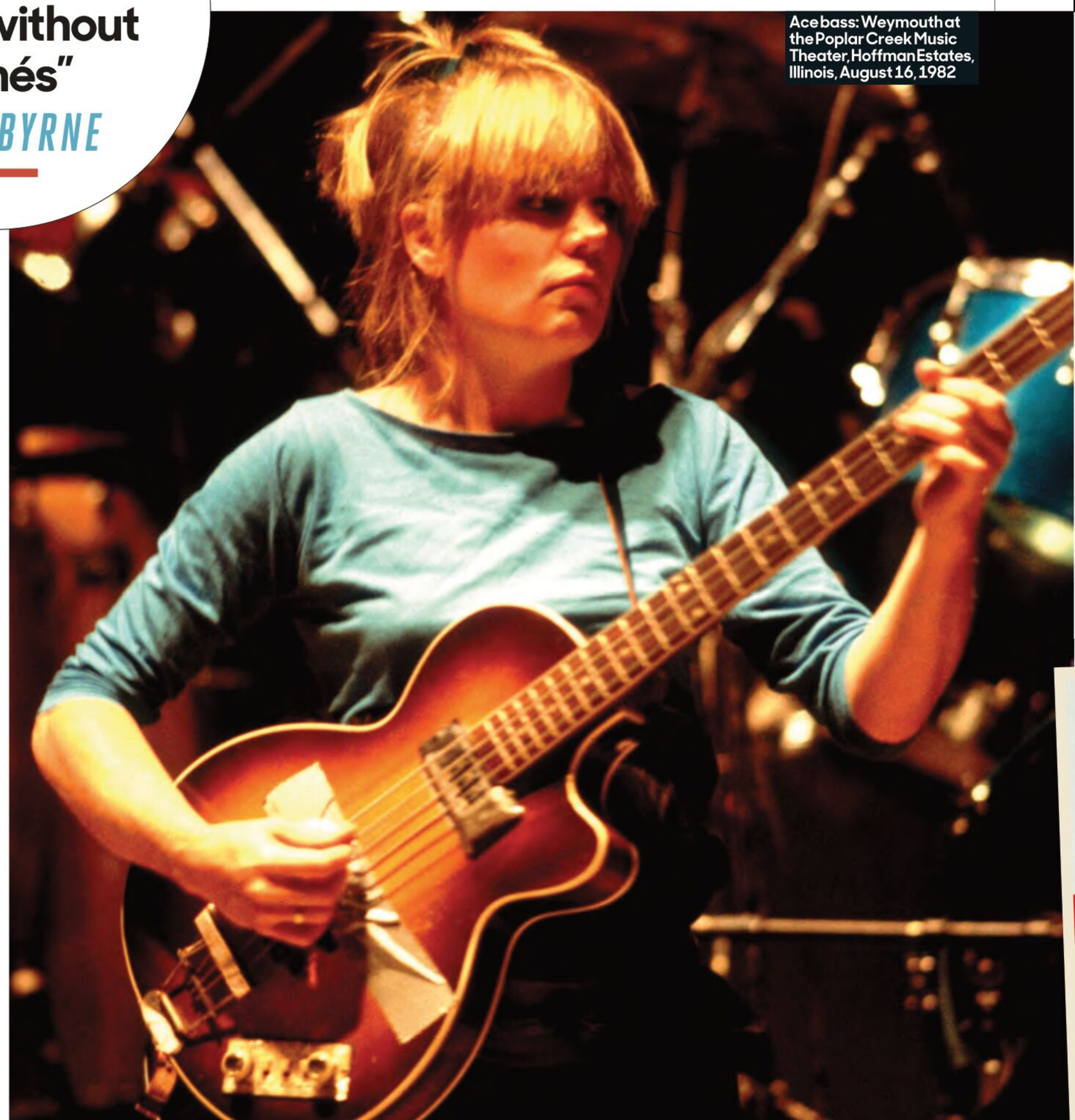
Now pick them apart: one, two, three.

> "I constantly try to write love songs without clichés"
> DAVID BYRNE

REDUCTIO AD ABSURDUM: THE TOM TOM CLUB

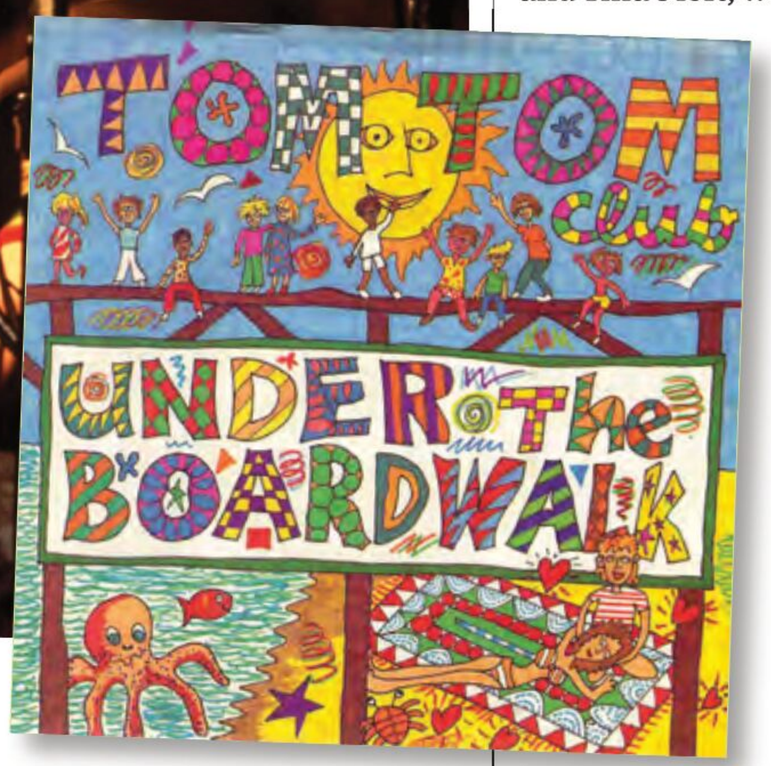
TINA WEYMOUTH won't do interviews now (as their tour manager grandly told me with annunciatory importance, "She's pregnant!"), so she does not speak here. She and Chris Frantz embody the theme of domestic unity that patterns Talking Heads' operations like a roadway of suburban lawns. Marital and rhythm section partners, their sideline is the nursery-book roundabout of pop jingles and popping dance manners called the Tom Tom Club.

A club – society – family. Tina's sisters Laura and Lani are singers with the Club too. Her


Ace bass: Weymouth at the Poplar Creek Music Theater, Hoffman Estates, Illinois, August 16, 1982

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES (2)

Different drummer: Frantz a at the Poplar Creek Music Theater, August 16, 1982



brother Loric (actually in the US Air Force) wrote "Booming And Zooming" for them. The success of this spin-off has surprised them although its snagging array of punchlines and childish bubble and squeak has exactly the sort of frivolous appeal that tricks records into hits.

It is Talking Heads fizzed up and made guileless (no matter how ingenious its construction); an antidote of itching powder. It kicks against the bookish associations of its parents like an infant tippling in the family liquor cabinet. It can be quite infuriatingly trivial. Who needs to think when your feet just go?

They said that the Tom Tom Club would never play live, but here they are, warming up for the Talking Heads. It's a nucleus of the main group, plus Laura and Lani. The Weymouths twist in uniform mini-dresses: they play perhaps half their LP, together with a buck-toothed version of "Under The Boardwalk". If the Heads turn funk rhythms into abstract commodities, then the Tom Tom Club reduce them to a matchstick man dance.

It's no more than a perfunctory acknowledgement of the workings of the Club. Frantz and Weymouth enjoy themselves but look to be only vacationing from their sterner duties. They conclude on a long variation of "Genius Of Love" and their set is soon forgotten.

THE ENTERTAINER IN DAVID BYRNE

LIKE ME, David Byrne is a shy and nervous man. After five minutes of talking to him I wonder if we're going to cancel each other out. His large, dark eyes, set in his thin face like sepia moons, seem without lustre, but on the occasions when he flickers a look in my direction they seem like portals to something he won't surrender.

As we sit in a little room round the back of the great auditorium where the Heads will play in only a couple of hours, Byrne rocks and fidgets in his chair. He unearths a pack of cigarettes and appears surprised at discovering there are indeed cigarettes inside. In his shabby dark clothes he could resemble a Victorian embalmer. When he speaks there is a tangle of hesitancy in every sentence; when he laughs his lips draw back almost into a snarl and his eyes grow even wider.

No wonder some people have thought David Byrne a little crazy sometimes.

How does your attitude change in approaching a performance rather than a record? For us it's completely different. I guess some people record stuff they're used to playing live. We make more of it up as we go along in the studio.

What do you think about while you're performing? Very little, really. Occasionally a little detail runs through my mind, like remember to ask so-and-so to do such-and-such before the next song. Those kind of things. Otherwise it's just running on intuition and energy and that sort of thing. I just let myself sink into each song.

Is the way you develop music completely internalised? No. There's pressure – we've just learned to work around them. On the record we're working on now we've rehearsed a lot in Chris and Tina's loft, working out a groove. And we've switched instruments a lot. I think we're receptive to most things...

You mentioned recently that you were going to move back into the area of very short, concise songs. Yeah, they tend to be not as short as I thought. But they are more song-like, although they might not sound like that to other people. The impression I've got is that they have some of the elements of the more recent stuff and some of the sparseness of the early things we did. That came out of listening to all those old tapes for the live album.

How did working on *The Catherine Wheel* music alter your views on the relationship between music and dance? It confirmed an idea that I had that all popular music tends to be associated with certain dances that are in vogue at that time – if a song had a certain beat it necessarily stood a better chance in the marketplace. Whereas the music I wrote for *The Catherine Wheel* didn't call to mind any social dancing. Most of it seemed danceable, but you wouldn't know what kind of dancing to do to it. Which made me think that club dancing is very conservative, because everyone instantly recognises the music and dance put together. I hadn't listened to that music in a while but I played it a couple of days ago and it sounded OK.

Do you use any devices to distance yourself from the music you make? No... nothing except listening to it the next day and seeing if it still sounds good.

Is it possible then to attain an ecstasy in music? Yeah! It's hard to have an objectivity or distance when you get that involved. I feel that I can distance myself after the event. Often I can't make out what the words and music are about when I'm writing them. I just have a strong ▶

Tom Tom Club interviewed by *Music Life* in a hotel room, Tokyo, April 1982: Tina Weymouth (right) with two of her seven sisters, Laura and Lani

KOH HASEBE/SHINKO MUSIC/GETTY IMAGES

intuitive sense, like, that phrase is great. The decisions are kind of based on whether the music surprises me. If it seems like I wrote it without knowing what it was about and it somehow pleases me, then that's the most exciting thing.

How self-critical are you? Fairly, I guess. Judging by the way I see the state of popular music too... half the crap that's out there.

It seems to me that pop's retreating into a full-flushing romanticism – the heart's outpourings, the public confessional. Do you feel very distant from that? Personally, when I want to hear something romantic I tend to listen to Willie Nelson. But I constantly try to write love songs, without clichés. I think I'm getting close to it... but, yeah, I guess they're not really what you'd call 'romantic'. There's a lot of poor music around, but it doesn't drive me to do better.

Do you set yourself any disciplines? A particular work-rate? I try to. For quite a while I tried to have a routine, from noon until seven o'clock or something. I tried to keep that going, like a nine-to-five job. I worked a little bit. It helps to sit down in front of blank paper rather than just wandering around waiting for inspiration to strike.

Do you think you might exhaust rock music as a vehicle for what you want to do? That's always possible, I guess... I tend to have a real narrow definition of 'rock'. I think of it as Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Buddy Holly, stuff within a very defined area. I would have to ask myself it we've exhausted the possibilities of pop songs – if they have any thrill left in them. They still do for me. There's something nice about confining yourself to one area. I've never been able to write something longer than seven or eight minutes. That's twice as long as a normal pop song but it's no opera.

How did the project with The B-52's come about? They simply asked me to produce them. I thought it turned out OK. They're more used to going into the studio with their material all ready... sometimes it was difficult. They tend to be fairly quiet offstage and you have to pull their opinions out of them.

Do you ever feel like you're doing too much in Talking Heads? Too much? (Pause) Not lately, no. It has crossed my mind. But not lately.

Is there something quintessentially 'American' about Talking Heads, despite all the 'European' art pretensions and 'African' rhythms? Mmm... the traditional American pop bands always tended to sound like The Who or The Yardbirds when we were starting out. I guess we're sort of a mishmash, but I don't see what more we can do to change all those labels people used to put on us, the 'artiness'. I don't see much difference in New York artiness as compared with the European variety. In New York most of our audience is black – may be elsewhere in the country too. We might consider what we do as some kind of art form, but it doesn't mean we can't have fun, get excited or be sexy or whatever.

What pleasures have you derived from being a public figure? It's helped me meet people which through shyness or whatever I might not have approached. I don't just mean girls (laughter). That's true as well. Sometimes I meet too many people who are interesting.

> "I don't see much difference in New York artiness compared with the European variety"
> DAVID BYRNE

Do you ever think there's something you want to say, but there's no way of saying it in what you're doing? Yeah. I tend to feel strongly about various political or social issues and have to justify to myself why I haven't done anything to express my feelings on it. It's pretty rare, but other people have written songs that deal with things like that. And I tend to think that the role of performing artists isn't to enter the debate, but to help inspire some sort of moral attitude in their listeners.

That's awfully vague (sighs)... it could just be to the extent of assisting in reaching some moral ground for dealing with these wider issues that come up. Which could easily be misinterpreted as a Falwell/Moral Majority sort of thing. But I try to deal with them very gently in songs. Not a 'be good, be nice to you mom' attitude but something a little deeper. More out in the ether.

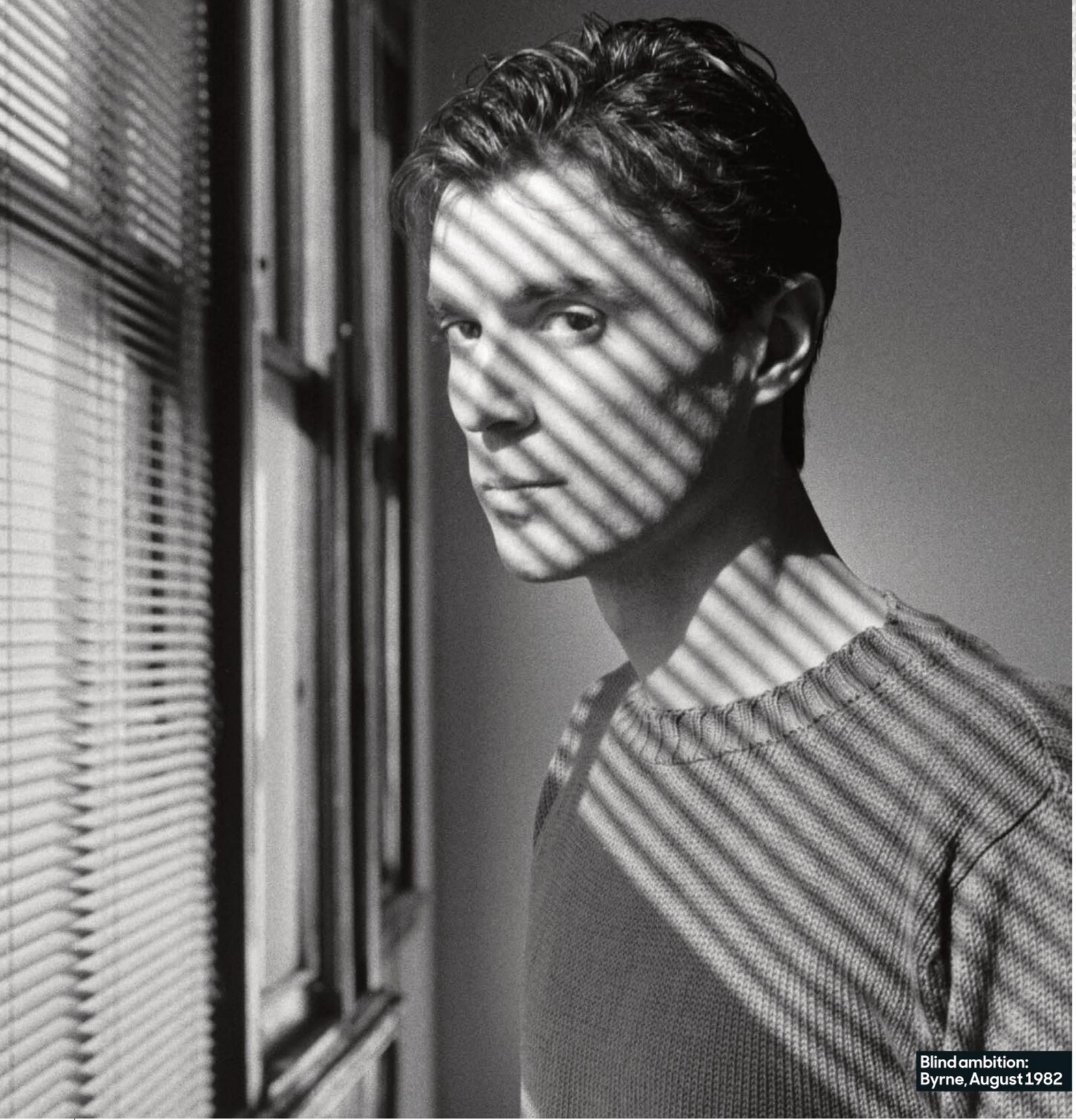
If your work is spreading out that's a little unusual for the self-sufficient artist, who tends to pare away excess as he progresses. It is a narrowing down in a way – into deeper regions of the interior (smiles). It's difficult to be specific about what's going on in there. "Once in A Lifetime" was described as Byrne putting down suburbia, again, and I think it was a little more than that. Maybe I was wrong.

Would anything make you quit? I don't think anything would. Some people would say, If Reagan gets elected I'm leaving this country, and then it happens and they set themselves a more outrageous one – if Haig takes over I'm leaving! It's always better to stay and deal with something, try for something better.

Do you see Talking Heads as a career? Only in the vaguest sense. When we first started getting on the radio I thought about it like that then, but now we've been getting less and less. If we had a big hit single... We believe it's better in the long run to contain ourselves.

How far ahead are you looking? Ten years? I don't have any plans beyond the next few

PETER NOBLE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES


Blind ambition: Byrne, August 1982

months. I wonder if we're becoming some sort of institution in a way? Like, Talking Heads – they're always around.

Is yours the best pop group there is? What? That's hard to say...

If I was in a group like yours and had been doing it for some time I'd certainly want to try and be the best. Since we tend to change what we do a little bit from record to record it's hard for us to get a handle on what we are and what we're supposed to be the best at. Sometimes I hear records by other people and I have jealous wishes, like I wish I'd written that or that I could sing like that. And that's good.

JERRY HARRISON'S MIDDLE AMERICA

JERRY HARRISON, guitar and keyboards, comes from Milwaukee. He joins my conversation with Byrne at halfway; his buttery, humorous voice oils Byrne's confidence.

Harrison has always seemed the loser to Byrne's gush of ideas, and when his own record (*The Red And The Black*) appeared last year it sounded like nothing so much as a dense, straining set of variations on the Heads' already deeply ingrained primer. Though an entertaining and sometimes surprising LP, it posited no character on Harrison's rustic features, eyes surrounded by smile creases below his unchanging cluster of curls.

Harrison's stance isn't difficult to divine: he has his niche in the group, it depends on his skills and catalytic strength if not on his inspiration and eccentricity. He's a moderate American pop star, one of many, and I doubt if his contributions will stand as very significant in the judgement. And here he is now.

"When I made my record I had fewer people to turn to. It was hard to be the singer and write the lyrics – that made me very anxious. I was afraid I wasn't up to the par of David or Jonathan Richman. But I threw myself into it so far until I couldn't get out.

Jerry Harrison backstage at CBGB's in 1977

"Yes, I do feel overwhelmed by David at times. He's very challenging. He doesn't allow as many distractions to enter his life as I do and he can pile ahead more quickly than me. I get involved in lots of things, some personal things... there doesn't always seem to be time for me to do things.

"I think there's an advantage to that in that it can humanise you and give you experiences you don't have. If you feel you're developing personally you shouldn't worry. It's easy to compare yourself with someone who seems more successful, but if you're moving forward you shouldn't feel bad.

"I always wanted to have some success as a musician. I was disappointed when I was in The Modern Lovers and they fell apart. But to me it's exciting to play in Tulsa in a place where there's pictures of Hank Williams and Bob Wills on the wall – they played there and now you've got to play there. Or to play in some famous place in New York you used to hear about. That kind of connection with the past is something I find exciting.

"When we began there were a lot of bands that expressed ideologies – sort of leftovers from the '60s political movements – and you've since seen the failure of ideology. Rather than developing they'd just grasp the narrowest part of a belief as a way of giving themselves an identity. And we never wanted to slip into that. Many of our early songs were seen as contradictory because we wanted to feel different ways at different times.

"The fact that we've been together as long as we have – if we had a hit now, we'd be able to take it in our stride. If it had happened early on it could have been difficult to deal with those pressures. It would've been like The Pretenders. Most groups don't make more than a couple of good records anyway.

"I don't think of us as a pop group. When we started David had the kind of voice which could never be a pop crooner's. We were in the realm of pop by playing short songs, but we never set out to be big pop group. Many people see it just as a craft to be perfected. I thought we were good because we had something to investigate too. It's never just the perfecting of technique."

What began as a stratagem of irony – crystallised perhaps in the wry benevolence of "Don't Worry About The Government" – has grown comfortable if still engrossing in its middle years.

Talking Heads make classical American pop-rock: they've stuck out a run of records that traverse the troubled crossing points of bubblegum funk and a pretend avant-garde sensitivity and by accident have won the laurels of critical and, gradually, popular credibility. It is less of a surprise when you realise how their heart is genteel.

This group will run a long time yet. They need each other. They are the Quiet Americans. ▲

RICHARD COOK

JOE STEVENS

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

RELEASED: JUNE 1, 1983

Reggae, funk and the band's own creative tensions help birth a funky art-pop crossover record. On a revisit, it makes a surprising amount of sense. BY DANIEL DYLAN WRAY

BY 1983 Talking Heads found themselves in a position that many bands do after being together almost a decade. All members had splintered off to make solo or side-project records and in the meantime a live album plugged the gap of a studio one. On top of this, band tensions were escalating and this was a recipe for a strange, disjointed, perhaps even unenthused, album. Instead, *Speaking In Tongues* is one of the loosest and funkiest records Talking Heads ever made.

The title references glossolalia – literally speaking in tongues/an unintelligible language – and the link it has to Byrne's approach to singing and lyrics. "I originally sang nonsense and then found words to fit," he said of this gibbering style. It's also the first album they produced themselves, after making a trio of albums with Eno. Frantz would later say Eno had simply become too demanding, insisting on flying by Concorde on the band's dime. When the band approached Tony Visconti about potentially producing, he told them they didn't need a producer, just a good engineer. This was Butch Jones, along with overdubbing and mixing work by Grace Jones' go-to man Alex Sadkin.

Possibly being unshackled from outsider producer input freed up the band somewhat. While always a band in perpetual service to the groove, the taut rigidity of their earlier work – led by a guitar-playing style that simply felt like an extension of Byrne's nervous character – is more relaxed and loose here, leaving more space for synths, percussion and wobbly bass. The opening "Burning Down The House" – a title plucked from an audience chant of "Burn down the house!" that Frantz and Weymouth heard at a Parliament-Funkadelic show – begins with woozy keyboard, as a twisting guitar line seeps in, before a rapid burst of concert toms explode from the brought-in percussionist Steve Scales. What follows is a pulsing flurry of cascading drums, funk guitar, squelchy keys and a melody and swaggering chorus as infectious as it is irresistible. It was the band's only Top 10 US single.

"Burning Down The House" sets the tone for an album that became a crossover into the mainstream – managing to straddle the line between the band's deep-rooted art-rock sensibilities along with their burgeoning pop tendencies. It's also their most flat-out funk record. The African influences that played such a crucial role on *Remain In Light* and *My Life In The Bush of Ghosts* seem to have run their course here, and instead of intricate polyrhythms and tightly coiled grooves you have big splashes of synth that shower all over big strutting basslines, unravelling rhythms and airy production. This is perfectly encapsulated on "Girlfriend Is Better" and the contribution of guest Bernie Worrell (Parliament-Funkadelic) whose synthesiser work is so crucial and vibrant it competes with Byrne's vocals for a lead place in the mix.

Another guest that makes a sizeable impact is Nona Hendryx, whose call-and-response vocals with Byrne on "Slippery People" adds a surge of dynamism and rhythmic swing. However, the core band are also in flush-tight form here without the help of guests. Weymouth's bass in particular is critical, such as on the elongated outro to "Slippery People", which could easily be chopped and worked into a disco cut itself, with her silky strut coalescing seamlessly with Harrison's deft key work. While funk is the defining feel of the album, the band also open themselves up wider. "Swamp" is about as close to a blues riff as the band have ever been, while "I Get Wild/Wild Gravity" has a dub-reggae beat gently simmering underneath.

Lyrically, Byrne is as abstruse as ever and trying to pluck cohesive meaning from the album, or even single songs, can be futile. Back in 1983 he said of his nonsense-turned-into-cryptic-observations approach: "It's like a chair. You can look at it for a long time but you

CRITICS' VERDICT

"Talking Heads come steaming back with a tough-talking return to form. The album includes some familiar hallmarks and even a lick or two reminiscent of past Heads product, but above all it's confident, purposeful, often fraught with danger and regularly hypnotic"
ADAM SWEETING
MELODY MAKER, JUNE 11, 1983

"The dialects of the record are housed in Byrne's trenchant voice; it is to Byrne's step and mood that the music murmurs. Whether you take to it or not depends mostly on your tolerance for his civilised anguish"
RICHARD COOK,
NME, JUNE 11, 1983

TRACKMARKS

1. Burning Down The House ★★★★★
2. Making Flippy Floppy ★★★
3. Girlfriend Is Better ★★★★★
4. Slippery People ★★★★
5. I Get Wild/Wild Gravity ★★★★
6. Swamp ★★★★
7. Moon Rocks ★★★
8. Pull Up The Roots ★★★
9. This Must Be The Place (Naive Melody) ★★★★

Label: Sire
Produced by: Talking Heads
Recorded at: Blank Tape and Sigma Sound, NYC; Compass Point, Nassau
Personnel: David Byrne (vocals, keys, guitars, bass, synth, percussion), Chris Frantz (drums, backing vocals, synth), Jerry Harrison (keys, synth, guitars, b/v), Tina Weymouth (bass, b/v, synth, guitar), Wally Badarou (synth), Rapheal DeJesus (perc), Nona Hendrxy (b/v), Richard Landry (sax), Dolette McDonald (b/v), Steve Scales (perc), L Shankar (double violin), David Van Tieghem (perc), Alex Weir (guitar), Bernie Worrell (synth)
Highest chart position: UK 21; US 15

won't understand it. You have to sit in it to understand it." Suggesting that only when seated comfortably deep inside the crevices of Byrne's strange mind will it click. The fervent cry of "*Stop making sense*" on "Girlfriend Is Better" is arguably something of a lyrical mantra for the album.

However, it's not all an impenetrable collection of words spliced together, serving the groove rather than providing thematic narrative. The album closes on a straight-down-the-line love song, the first of its kind from Byrne. "This Must Be The Place (Naive Melody)" remains a pinnacle achievement; an overwhelmingly beautiful, poignant and unique composition that is one of the band's truly timeless offerings. It also adds to the unshakable feeling from the LP of a band opening themselves up: to new styles, new approaches, new audiences. And, in the case of the closing track, opening up Byrne's heart.

THE TAUT RIGIDITY OF THEIR EARLIER WORK IS MORE RELAXED AND LOOSE HERE

HISTORICALLY, *Speaking In Tongues* has always felt like a bit of an afterthought when assessing the canon of the band. Following *Remain In Light* was always going to be a tricky move, but this album being somewhat overlooked is perhaps more because of what came next rather than what preceded it. When the band toured the album and released the game-changing live album *Stop Making Sense*, for many that record created the definitive versions of these songs. Often faster – which Frantz later attributed to too much cocaine when recording the shows – and more dynamic and explosive in parts due to a larger band all firing at once. *Speaking In Tongues* can feel slightly slower and more spacious in comparison.

However, it's arguably the band's most transitional album and it remains a record that documents an artistic and evolutionary leap as great as any other in their catalogue. *Speaking In Tongues* retains the core idiosyncratic essence of the band but catapults them into new terrain, along with laying the groundwork for what would come next in the form of their best-ever-selling album. ▲

CLOSE TO THE BONE

RELEASED: JULY 1983

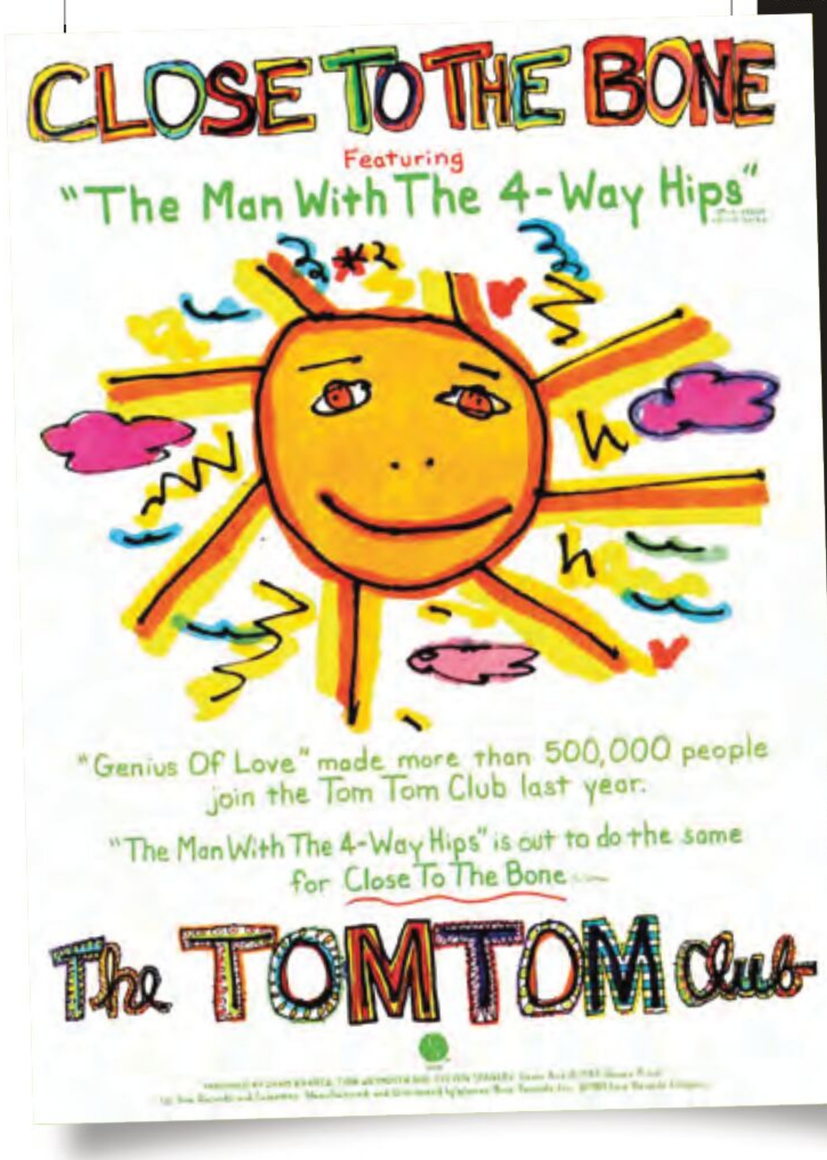
Same lineup. Same location. Still, the second album by Chris and the Family Weymouth fails to recapture the magic of the first. BY DAVID QUANTICK

HAPPY MUSIC? People love happy music! But some people – let's call them critics – are suspicious of it, because happy music is uplifting, it's easy, it's not made of tears, it's got a good beat and you can dance to it, and it's light.

In 1983, Tina Weymouth would have begged to disagree. "Just because Tom Tom Club is light doesn't mean it's not for real and we don't really believe in it. We feel strongly that there's room for happy, vivacious music," she told an interviewer at the time of *Close To The Bone*'s release, in a manner that could be described as defensive, had not the first Tom Tom Club album been such an artistic and commercial success (at the time, it outsold all the Talking Heads records put together).

But the problem with happy, vivacious music is that – as John Lennon put it in a different context, you can't reheat a soufflé. If the first TTC album was a reaction against the Byrne and Eno Talking Heads regime, then the second was – what? Weymouth was able to elaborate: "The first record was a relief from Talking Heads' seriousness. With the second record, since we're already part of Talking Heads, we don't want to be competing with our own selves at our own game, so we're trying to work in another area."

This may not be the most thrilling quote of all time about someone's new record, but to be frank, finding any information about Tom Tom Club's second album is not easy. Its Wikipedia page is shorter than a doll's miniskirt, and it doesn't even get a mention in Chris Frantz's autobiography – which instead gives over that era to a description of hanging out with famous people in Nassau without doing any recording. Frantz did talk about the recording of the album in one interview, saying, "By that time we'd brought in a lot of Talking Heads personnel who'd just been on the road with us, and they had a preconception of what Tom Tom Club was about, whereas we'd had none of that with the first album."



CRITICS' VERDICT

"1981's Tom Tom Club was an erratic bouncy ensemble... 1983's Tom Tom Club follows the same course on a much lower level; sloppy and childish, weak and uninspired. Most of the time they sound like Bananarama or grown adults playing five-year-olds for the day. It's not a pretty sound... All the qualities that this music begs for - instinct and drive - are AWOL, leaving *Close To The Bone* a flat exercise in rhythm and melody." PAOLO HEWITT, NME, AUGUST 6, 1983

In general, second albums exist either in competition with or as a continuation of the first one: and *Close To The Bone* follows the latter path, being recorded at the same location with the same personnel (this time the Weymouth sisters are joined by Chris's brother Roddy) and in pretty much the same style. The front cover is, once again, by James Rizzi, and there's even a song called "Pleasure Of Love", for Tom Tom Club fans who love "Of Love" songs. It has the same sunny grooves as its predecessor – albeit lacking some of the juicier hooks – the same naive vocals by Tina and her sisters, the same naive melodies (perhaps minus some of the jauntiness) and a delightful mixture of optimism and wryness.

What it lacks – inevitably – is any element of surprise, because we've heard all this before, done fresher and better. That's not to say *Close To The Bone* is a bad record – it's not a bad record, it's a good record – but it's an unadventurous record, lacking the sense of happy accident that marked the debut's best

TRACKMARKS

1. Pleasure Of Love ★★★
2. On The Line Again ★★★
3. This Is A Foxy World ★★★
4. Bamboo Town ★★★
5. The Man With The 4-Way Hips ★★★
6. Measure Up ★★
7. Never Took A Penny ★★★
8. Atsababy! (Life Is Great) ★★★

Label: Island (UK)/ Sire (US)
Produced by: Chris Frantz, Tina Weymouth, Steven Stanley
Recorded at: Compass Point Studios, Nassau
Personnel includes: Tina Weymouth (bass, vocals), Chris Frantz (drums, vocals), Alex Weir (guitar), Wally Badarou, Tyrone Downie, Rupert Hine, Raymond Jones, (keyboards), Steve Scales (perc), Lani Weymouth, Laura Weymouth, Roddy Frantz (vocals)
Highest chart position: UK –; US 73

moments. Tom Tom Club themselves must know this, as *Close To The Bone* never came out on CD, only eventually being reissued in the 21st century as part of a double set with the debut album.

BY THIS TIME, ENO WAS OUT OF THE PICTURE AND TALKING HEADS WERE A BAND AGAIN

THERE'S NOTHING particularly wrong with *Close To The Bone* – songs like "The Man With The Four-Way Hips" – a line that Roddy Frantz came up with – or "On The Line Again" (a reference to Chris's flourishing cocaine habit, perhaps), but there's nothing exceptional about it, either. A song like "Bamboo Road", a languid meditation on the life of a jitney driver, is a distant cousin of "Uptown Top Rankin'", but seems reluctant to get off the porch and actually do anything. As for "Pleasure Of Love", it sounds petty, but if you're a Tom Tom Club song called that, you really should think about changing your name to avoid getting mixed up with your far more exciting sibling. "This Is A Foxy World" – "*freedom for the sexes and equality*" – has a lazy-lidded groove and a trademark simplistic Weymouth vocal, but lacks a hook to make its point hit home. "Atsababy! (Life Is Great)" features gurgling and burbling and a slightly cumbersome rap, but it's 1983 not 1981 and shouting at the mic does not a great hip-hop jam make. "Never Took A Penny" has a fantastic summer groove worthy of Sly & Robbie, but is let down by the schoolroom vocals. And so on, and so forth.

One hates to keep comparing two different records, even when they're not that different, but when Weymouth and Frantz formed Tom Tom Club, it was as a release from not only the stress and tension of being the ignored ones in their own band, and what they brought to the party was – well, the party, as in all the fun stuff missing from the brainbox hothouse of 1981 Talking Heads. But by the time of *Close To The Bone*, Eno was out of the picture, Talking Heads were a band again, and – one suspects strongly – all the good ideas were being diverted back into the mothership rather than the side project.

Also, you know, this is a happy record, and happy is nice, but it doesn't always make for great music. ▲

STOP MAKING SENSE

RELEASED: SEPTEMBER 12, 1984

Even without a shoulder pad in sight, the album of Jonathan Demme's acclaimed concert film captures Talking Heads' incendiary live force.

BY SHARON O'CONNELL

"HI, I'VE got a tape I wanna play," announces David Byrne at the start. An 808 drum track kicks in, then he launches into some insistent strumming on his nylon-string acoustic and works up a spare but compellingly resonant solo version of the 1977 song the band would forever be tethered to in popular imagination.

This version of "Psycho Killer" was necessarily performative, since it was the opener of Talking Heads' set on their *Speaking In Tongues* tour and, consequently, of four consecutive nights they played at Hollywood's Pantages Theater in December of 1983, three of which were filmed for Jonathan Demme's concert movie, also called *Stop Making Sense*. The dates were a kind of victory lap following the platinum success of *Speaking In Tongues*, so both the movie and live album capture the band at their peak. But the relationship between any live music recording and its documentation on celluloid is an odd one, with differences in both the dynamics of the two sets and in their transmission and reception; to state the obvious, record and film are not identical, however much one or both might claim to be faithful to the original performance. An art-school background meant Talking Heads – and Byrne in particular – were acutely aware of visual presentation but there's crucial audio drama in that "Psycho Killer" introduction, too. It's every bit as impactful on record as it is on film: "What follows is a set piece, so pay attention," it seems to say.

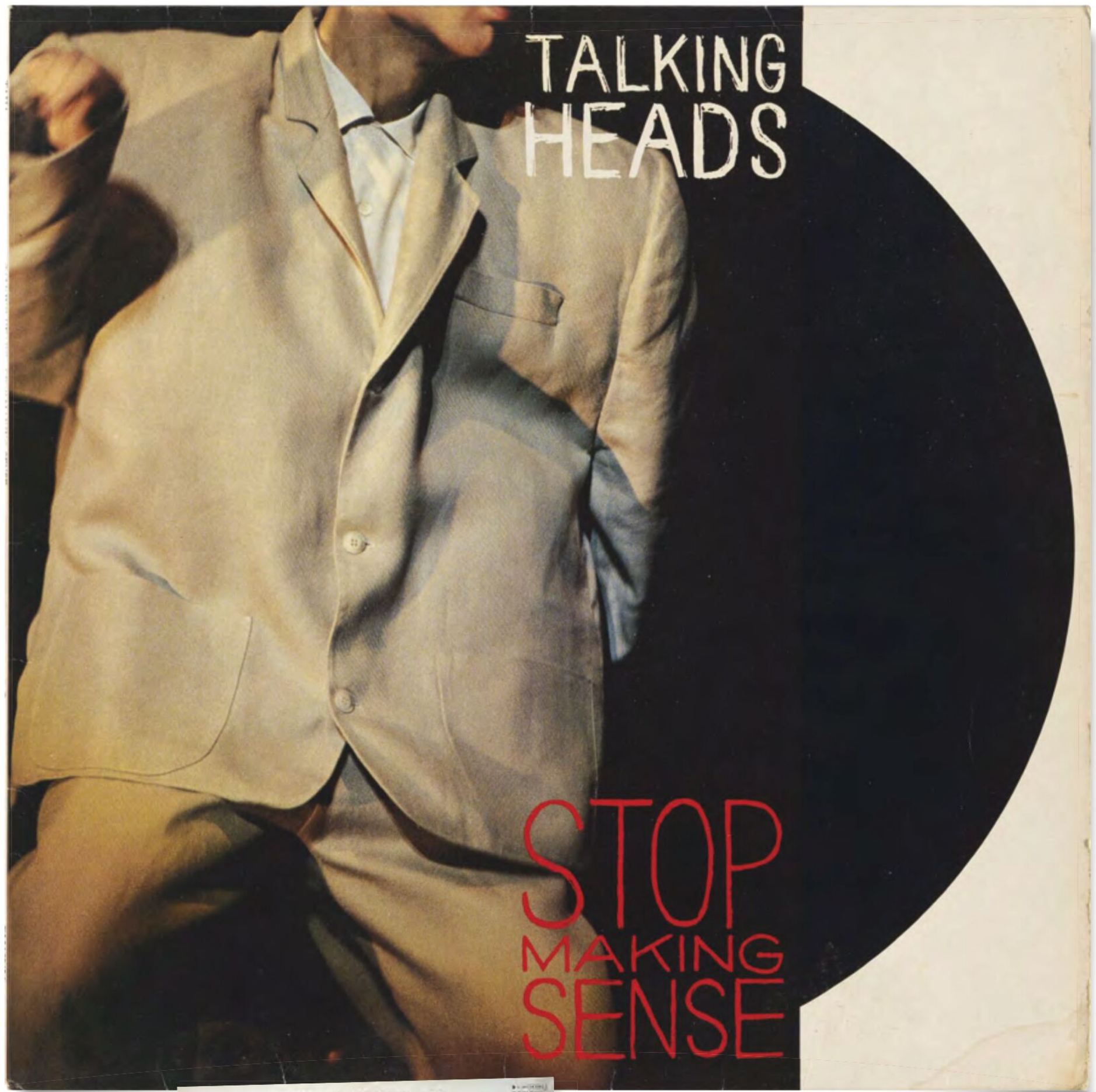
Of course, *Stop Making Sense* wasn't the band's first live album – that was their 1982 double, *The Name Of This Band Is Talking Heads*, a career summary whose first disc draws on shows pegged to their first three LPs, while the second captures the *Remain In Light* tour. Releasing two live albums so close together is highly unusual – plenty of bands avoid the format altogether – but even though serious fractures had started to appear within TH three years previously, it's an indication of their artistic confidence during this period and the recognition of their own incendiary force on stage. Although *Stop Making Sense* was generated by the movie, it was released a month before, in September of 1984, with a profile that remains far from regular. Vinyl's capacity means that only nine songs (totalling less than 40 minutes) from the concert's original 16 appear, allowing room for just four from the album the tour was promoting, while there are various edits, dubs and tweaks throughout. "Psycho Killer", for instance, stretched out to a carefully landscaped six-and-a-half minutes on stage, but is trimmed to four and a half in the audio, although cassette and (then newly fangled) CD formats afford longer versions of some songs. And, rather than remaining faithful to the concert, the cassette and CD versions of "Slippery People" are a different mix from the LP.

None of this matters to anybody who hasn't memorised the movie, of course, but it does underline the fact that there's nothing strictly "authentic" (not even in relation to its own twin) about *Stop Making Sense*. That was never Talking Heads' concern. More interesting – and baffling – is the fact that the order of songs as originally performed was changed. At the Pantages Theater, the band played the keening "Heaven" after "Psycho Killer", adding members one at a time for slow-reveal tension, but on the record a full-band run from *Speaking In Tongues* begins: the Tom Waits-fronts-Chicory-Tip lurch of "Swamp" is followed by "Slippery People", "Burning Down The House" and "Girlfriend Is Better" (whose repeated line supplies the album's title). The LP then fully commits to throwing the concert's chronological order out of

CRITICS' VERDICT

"Without the benefit of its visual counterpart, it may be presumptious to pass a fatal judgement but the material *is* surprisingly *obvious*... Talking Heads at their best are superb pioneers... at worst they are sucked under by the sardonic overtures of a detachedly concentrated wit."
HELEN FITZGERALD, MELODY MAKER, OCTOBER 20, 1984

"Talking Heads still boiling under, David Byrne head mouth and trousers centre stage, a lyric-fashioned music, quite quaint really... David Byrne is positively burdened by being sensible."
IAN PENMAN, NME, OCTOBER 27, 1984



TRACKMARKS

1. Psycho Killer ★★★★
2. Swamp ★★★★★
3. Slippery People ★★★★
4. Burning Down The House ★★★★★
5. Girlfriend Is Better ★★★★★
6. Once In A Lifetime ★★★★
7. What A Day That Was ★★★
8. Life During Wartime ★★★★★
9. Take Me To The River ★★★

Label: Sire/Warner Bros (US/Canada); EMI (worldwide)
Produced by: Talking Heads, Gary Goetzman
Recorded at: Pantages Theater, Can-Am Recorders, Ocean Way Recording, Right Track Recording, LA
Personnel: David Byrne (guitar, vocals), Chris Frantz (drums), Jerry Harrison (gtr, keys), Tina Weymouth (bass, synth bass, gtr), Alex Weir (gtr), Bernie Worrell (keys), Steve Scales (perc), Ednah Holt, Lynn Mabry (backing vocals)
Highest chart position: UK 24; US 41

whack by rewinding to *Remain In Light* via "Once In A Lifetime". Why the galloping "Thank You For Sending Me An Angel", the third number in the live performance, was dropped altogether is one of several mysteries, but the original order was reinstated in 1999's Special New Edition, featuring the full, 16-track concert set.

ITS REAL POWER LIES IN THE SONGS' LIVE DIFFERENCE TO THEIR ORIGINAL RECORDINGS

THE REAL power of *Stop Making Sense*, though, lies in the songs' live difference to their original recordings, not its mapping of Talking Heads' career arc. The performance is everything, and its room-filling, in-the-moment physicality is audible, especially in the vamping voodoo grooves of "Slippery People" and the ecstatic liberation of "Burning Down The House". In the liner notes for *Once In A Lifetime: The Best Of Talking Heads*, Chris Frantz said of the former that the original recording "had a funky and compact sound. This *Stop Making Sense* version is funky and big as a house. (Or should I say church?)". "Once In A Lifetime", which gains a full extra minute, sounds even more unstoppably supple than the original, while the Al Green/Mabon "Teenie" Hodges hit "Take Me To The River" is a hepped-up gospel frug which admits a spot of James Brown-style whooping from guitarist Alex Weir and is teased out, totally transforming its profile. Throughout the album's 1999 full version especially, there's verve and brio in spades, as the set builds from "Psycho Killer" through multiple, mini contact-trips to its exhilarating finale.

"The explosion of joy is real," David Byrne declared of the Pantages Theater shows, at a Q&A following a Lincoln Center screening of *Stop Making Sense* in 2014. "We're having fun as a band, but it's coming from the audience too. We're totally feeding off the audience reaction." That energy, euphoria and funky conviction also surge through this record, which explains why it's routinely named as one of the best live albums ever. That it's also a document with a singular provenance and an identity issue seems entirely fitting for a band like Talking Heads. ▲

"Most of the time I feel like I'm getting into another character"

RICHARD E. AARON/REDFERNS

Byrne's expanding Heads band, 1984

With the help of director JONATHAN DEMME and a large suit, DAVID BYRNE reinvents the concert movie as a dramatic event. "It's like watching somebody else," Byrne tells CHARLES SHAAR MURRAY. "The moments when I drop out of character and start floundering are the most uncomfortable to watch."

The Talking Heads lineup for the *Stop Making Sense* film in 1984: (l-r) Steve Scales, Bernie Worrell, Jerry Harrison, Ednah Holt, David Byrne, Lynn Mabry, Tina Wemouth, Chris Frantz and Alex Weir

YOU MAY find yourself... the leader of a rock band (of sorts)!

You may find yourself... starring in a movie of that band's performance! You may find yourself... in a foreign country, staying in a fine hotel and talking to people about that band and that movie! And you may ask yourself... well, how did I get here? And you may ask yourself... what do I do now?

Watch out! You might get what you're after.

David Byrne, the talking head of Talking Heads, is one of pop music's stranger creatures. This is readily apparent when watching him perform: his onstage demeanour is hugely unsettling; nervous mannerism writ large, one long twitch.

Odd things keep happening to his body. His arms and legs move seemingly without conscious volition; he gazes down at them in horror. He speaks in tongues – a process alluded to in the title of Talking Heads' last studio album – and produces some of the most peculiar vocal noises in popular music.

In "Psycho Killer", the first great Talking Heads song and the opening number in the *Stop Making Sense* concert film, Byrne sings *"I'm tense and nervous and I can't relax"*. When he sings it, no one doubts him.

We dress like students, we dress like housewives.

Talking Heads are the staying-power champs of New York City's class of '75. They came out of CBGB's, Hilly Kristal's Bowery snake-pit, alongside Television, Blondie, the Ramones, Johnny Thunders' Heartbreakers and the Patti Smith Group. Although hardcore looks like bringing Da Brudders back strong, it's fair to say that Talking Heads have outlasted and outcreated their one-time peers.

Even then, Byrne and his crew were somewhat strange. They eschewed both the old and new models of rock flash – the standard stadium crap and the proto-punk rebel style – and they all seemed absolutely terrified.

At that time, Talking Heads were a trio – Byrne singing and playing guitar with Tina Weymouth and Chris Frantz in the rhythm section – and they looked like emotionally disturbed preppies, frightened pigeons in a den of cats. Their music was as wildly incongruous as their appearance: a giddy blend of folk-rock and white soul.

Midway through the performance, Byrne broke a string on his only electric guitar, and no-one ever made more of a display of changing it. The set ground to a halt and Byrne, his spiderly limbs contorted in an agony of embarrassment and clumsiness, seemed to be changing the string in slow-motion, face frozen, eyes staring.

Nine years later, the *New York Times* is hailing Byrne as being "in the forefront of young American composers". He scores ballets as well as racking up hit singles and is generally big potatoes. Talking Heads, augmented from the basic quartet by an ever-changing gang of stellar funk sidepersons, frame his anguished yelp with a dense, polyrhythmic wash of sound that's still one of America's most stimulating rock noises.

I'm an ordinary guy... burning down the house.

BYRNE IS installed in a very comfortable suite at the Hyde Park Hotel, equipped with a video and a stack of tapes, including *The Evil Dead*. On a darkening Thursday afternoon, Byrne almost seems part of the encroaching shadows. In black slacks and shirt with immaculately polished black shoes, he dresses to emphasise his prodigious gawkiness. The slicked-back hair is now neatly trimmed and brushed forward. Despite his cordiality, he evinces an air of abstraction. He is not, however, a werewolf. I know this because his eyebrows do not meet in the middle. Not quite.

This is the meaning of life... to tune this electric guitar.

BYRNE REMEMBERS the broken-string incident at CBGB's all those years ago. He recalls dragging the incident out as long as possible to get more time onstage. Then, as now, Byrne's philosophy was that everything that happens on stage is part of the performance.

"The prevalent attitude seems to be, look at this bit, but try to ignore what's going on over there and try to ignore what you're seeing in the wings. Look at the fact that I've got a nice haircut and a good tailor, but ignore everything else; like the fact that I can't move. *Stop Making Sense* isn't so much a film about the band as a film about that performance. It's like doing a film of a play, rather than a documentary about a theatre company."

Unusually for a concert movie, *Stop Making Sense* includes no footage of the band arriving at a hall, no cute "spontaneous" conversations in the dressing room, and hardly any shots of the audience going wild over the band. Its sobriety and absence of rockumentary trappings is an integral part of the way director Jonathan Demme

SIRERECORDS/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

visualised the movie. "Our hope was that, through the way it was filmed, you do get to know the personalities of the band members and the various people who play onstage as they're introduced, and that Jonathan would cut to them when they're doing something that reveals their personality rather than when they're doing something flashy like a solo. You think of them as people rather than as... something else."

Byrne's speaking voice is quiet and oddly quavery. He looks away as he speaks, and his limbs assume odd, contorted shapes. Even answering fairly routine and unintrusive questions seems to be painful for him. Why am I tormenting this poor man? Byrne makes me feel as if I am poking him with a pointed stick.

The structure of *Stop Making Sense* is unusual (returning to business): it opens with Byrne arriving on a totally bare stage clutching an acoustic guitar and a ghetto-blaster.

The blaster blares out a beat-box backing tape to which Byrne performs a solo "Psycho Killer", and gradually the musicians join him. First Tina Weymouth strolls on to play some bass on "Heaven" and technicians wheel on keyboard stands and the drum kit for Jerry Harrison and Chris Frantz. As the set progresses, backdrops fall into place and the full band assembles.

Was the set/movie structured for visual or musical reasons, and was the order of songs intended to provide a cumulative build-up of information?

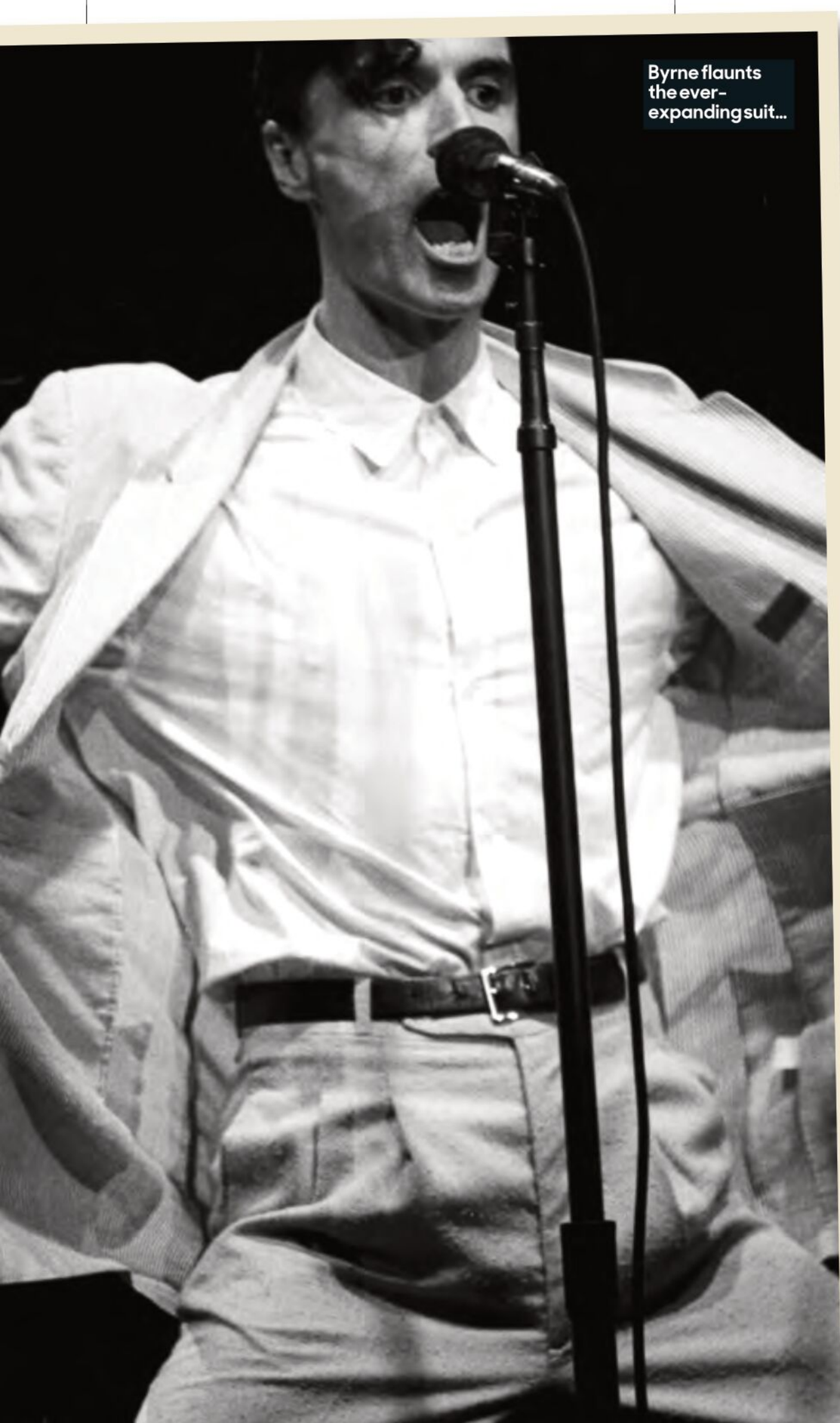
"Well, I think it would've been unsafe to end with a ballad or something, no matter how good it looked. In retrospect, Jonathan pointed out that there was some kind of psychological development going on. My character is kind of thrown into this situation and is a little bewildered by it – angst-ridden or whatnot – and gradually comes out of that until the end where he is eventually united with the other performers and comes out of that. He becomes a more comfortable human being and so it has a happy ending."

When the percussion break occurs in "Psycho Killer", Byrne is almost buffeted around the stage by the punishing beat-box track: acted upon by the music rather than moving it.

"That's what happened the first time I heard it! I'd programmed the drum machine and put it on cassette and played it for the first time in rehearsal, and I'd forgotten where the little drum breaks were, so every time they occurred it was a kind of surprise. It felt like I was being constantly surprised by this thing.

"A lot of the time it feels like that to me: that even though a song might be of my own, or our own, making, when it's performed onstage it's done to me or I'm being swept along by it. It's a pretty good feeling: that it's all being almost forced upon me. It makes it easier than having to get into it myself."

> "I'm totally subsumed by what I'm doing"
> DAVID BYRNE



Byrne flaunts the ever-expanding suit...

How does Byrne feel when he watches himself? What does he think about that person?

"Most of the time I feel like I'm getting into another character, through he does have a lot of elements of my own. That's pretty comforting to watch, because it's like watching somebody else. The moments when I drop out of character and start floundering are the most uncomfortable to watch."

Do characters suggest songs or vice versa?

"In the recent past it's been the music first and that has suggested a lyrical attitude, but before the attitude of the character or the words came first. Now I'm back to that, so it's almost as if someone else is writing the song.

"Often I'm surprised, and that's my favourite part of it, when I come up with something and I don't know where it came from.

"There's an old one called 'Electric Guitar' and I'm still not sure where that came from. I scribbled part of it down when we were touring in a station wagon, and read it to the band, and we all got a big giggle out of it, but I was real excited because I didn't know where it came from or what it represented.

"There's that song on *Remain In Light* called 'Born Under Punches'... that was real spontaneous, just improvised in the studio... spontaneous emissions."

Are there aspects of Byrne's character which don't surface in the music?

"Oh, yeah. My political views are not very... um... so... lately I did some posters for the election and I found that that was a much more comfortable outlet. Maybe each aspect of my character has its own ideal medium for expression.

"It's assumed that a lot of musicians are speaking for someone else – speaking for the steelworkers or for the underprivileged – whereas a lot of musicians are privileged people.

"I find that it rarely works, except in the case of someone like Robert Wyatt. When he does it I find it pretty touching in a way. They're definitely political sentiments that he's expressing, but he does it in a way that's so personal. It's an intense personal emotion that's being expressed which happens to be of a political nature."

In that filmed performance, did Byrne feel "present" the whole time?

"It's a funny feeling: that I can feel like I'm there, that I know where I am on stage, whether my shoes are tight, or in the middle of singing a song I can know what the next song's going to be. And at the same time, I'm not aware of that; I'm totally subsumed by what I'm doing. It's a nice place to be: kind of two at once."

What's the most satisfying part of Talking Heads? Is it that feeling of being subsumed?

"That's a good one. I think another one is probably to do with the reason why anyone performs on stage or creates anything, that you have something to say or to do and you want to get it before people. It's a great feeling. Even if they don't like it, it's a great feeling just to put it out and be heard. Even when I don't feel like doing it, it only takes two or three songs and then the music just takes me over again."

Byrne loosens up as the conversation goes on and the shadows draw in. He no longer fiddles with his shoelaces, and he starts to laugh more and more.

He's found a way to utilise shyness and awkwardness, so much parts of him, by dramatising them in his performance as he enacts his symbolic journey from the bare wires and raw nerves of "Psycho Killer" through to the healing and redemption of "Take Me To The River". He even makes ironic references to his being "angst-ridden" here and there in the conversation.

You can't be angst-ridden all the time, David. Do you wake up angst-ridden every morning?

"No, uh... most mornings I feel fine. Just fine." ▲

PETER ANDERSON

LITTLE CREATURES

RELEASED: JUNE 10, 1985

Beautiful house? Beautiful wife? Such are the American dreams of a homelier Heads, on a road back to basics, and to mainstream acceptance. BY ERIN OSMON

THERE COMES a point when we all want nice things. After years of chasing a savage and elusive muse, a gentle internal voice starts to echo with deafening reason: it doesn't have to be this hard. Suddenly, that which once seemed impossible, or offensive even, rings truer than any leftfield concept or lofty artistic statement. Marriage, children and the comfort of home: the life of our parents starts to sound pretty good.

Instead of flocking to the suburbs, Talking Heads hit the studio. *Rolling Stone* insisted *Little Creatures* was, "the sound of David Byrne falling in love with normalcy". And to a certain extent that's true. If there was ever a moment that Byrne shed his psychotic string bean persona, it was with this placid rumination on relationships, family and the roads travelled to such destinations, a halcyon pop cycle adorned with touches of washboard, accordion and steel guitar. The album marked a shift from the African polyrhythms and wild experimentalism that had once captivated Bryne. Instead, he looked to the promise of America.

The scale of vision emanated from the sleeve. Georgia was as foreign to the New York band as a bicycle to a fish, yet the homeward themes of *Little Creatures* all but beckoned the Southern state's hottest outsider artist, rural Baptist preacher Howard Finster. His self-taught work graced the cover of REM's second LP *Reckoning*, a watered-down version of the artist's intricate Christian apocalyptica. But for *Little Creatures* he was permitted to run wild, painting childlike caricatures of Weymouth, Frantz and Harrison situated among a landscape of Bible verses, white spired churches, black hills, cheetahs, woodland creatures, everyday folks, UFOs and anthropomorphic clouds – all the little creatures, real and imagined, alive under God's domain. Byrne, clad only in white briefs, assumes the position of Atlas, holding the world on his bare shoulders, an unintentionally apt depiction of his self-perceived role within the band and, much later, its legacy. *Rolling Stone* named it album cover of the year, marking the band's foray into such accolades.

Little Creatures was also the first time Byrne recorded and distributed demos ahead of a session, capturing his voice backed by guitar with a cassette recorder. The band rehearsed for about a month, working out the arrangements of each song before heading to Sigma Sound in midtown Manhattan. It was also the first time Byrne delineated himself as the primary songwriter in the band, which could have been a point of contention among members, who were accustomed to writing as a unit. Instead, they rolled with the new way of working, a welcome relief from the pressure of writing and performing on the spot during tracking, which lent the material a palpable ease. "It's so much fun to be able to relax and just play without feeling you have to be avant-garde all the time," Weymouth added to *The New York Times* in May 1985. "We spent so many years trying to be original that we don't know what original is anymore."

They shifted to universal concerns. "*Well, I've seen sex and I think it's alright/ It makes those little creatures come to life*," Byrne croons on third track "Creatures Of Love", the closest thing to a country song in the band's oeuvre, with gentle thumping bass and threads of steel guitar. On the face of it, the song is about children. Perhaps Byrne was inspired by his wedded rhythm section and their son, Robin, who was born in 1982. It's reasonable to assume that marriage and procreation was occupying at least some of Byrne's mental real estate. Two years later, in 1987, he'd marry his longtime girlfriend, Adelle Lutz, and then they'd soon have a daughter, Malu. "There's been a little bit of relaxation on David's part," Frantz told *Sounds* in July 1985. "Whatever it was that was making him ambitious to be taken seriously as an artist, he's getting that out of his system now."

"Stay Up Late" puts Byrne's baby fever on full display over a punchy groove that culminates in an explosive, entirely

CRITICS' VERDICT

"There are some things Talking Heads still do very well, and their familiar Arabesque scurries through opener 'And There She Was' counterpoint staccatto drums and oblique orchestration, before lush gospel-like choruses cascade into cliché. Byrne's lyrics have become even simpler, almost primitive in their conception..."
TED MICO, MM, JUNE 15, 1985

"Talking Heads have come full circle, dumped the excess of Afro-funk baggage picked up at the turn of the decade and have returned to the crisper, zippier thrust of old."
ADRIAN THRILLS, NME, JUNE 15, 1985

TRACKMARKS

1. And She Was ★★★★
2. Give Me Back My Name ★★★
3. Creatures Of Love ★★★★
4. The Lady Don't Mind ★★★
5. Perfect World ★★★
6. Stay Up Late ★★★★
7. Walk It Down ★★★
8. Television Man ★★★★
9. Road to Nowhere ★★★★★

Label: Sire
Recorded at: Sigma Sound, New York City
Produced by: Talking Heads
Personnel: David Byrne (guitar, vocals), Chris Frantz (drums), Jerry Harrison (keys, gtr, backing vocals), Tina Weymouth (bass gtr, bk vocals), Andrew Cader (washboard), Ellen Bernfeld, Erin Dickens, Diva Gray, Gordon Grody, Lani Groves, Kurt Yahijian (bk vocals), Jimmy Macdonell (accordion), Lenny Pickett (sax), Steve Scales, Naná Vasconcelos (perc), Eric Weissberg (steel guitar)
Highest chart position: UK 10; US 20

danceable chorus. "*Mommy had, a little baby/There he is, fast asleep/He's just, a little plaything/Why not, wake him up,*" he sings in the first verse, evidence of a newfound enthusiasm for family, and obvious naivety on the subject. In no world does any parent want to stir a sleeping baby. And things only get weirder from there. "*Cute cute, little baby/Little pee-pee, little toes,*" Byrne yelps.

In the idyllic family unit Byrne aspires to on *Little Creatures*, women are the archetypal 'better half'. Album opener "And She Was" was based on a "blissed-out hippie chick" the singer knew in Baltimore, who took acid and laid down in a field overlooked by a Yoo-hoo chocolate soda factory, according to Byrne-penned liner notes. The character has all the makings of a quirky, idealised heroine in a romantic comedy, and the infectious avant-pop musicality of the tune would serve as the perfect soundtrack, sort of like The Proclaimers' "I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles)" at the start of *Benny & Joon*. "Walk It Down" contains an outright plea for companionship sung over warbled, post-apocalyptic funk, while "The Lady Don't Mind" finds Byrne in the role of David Attenborough, narrating the fascinating modes of a woman seemingly immune to the kind of worry that fuelled his well-documented paranoia.

IT WAS THE FIRST TIME BYRNE DISTRIBUTED DEMOS AHEAD OF A RECORDING SESSION

IT ALL culminates in the huge, anthemic tome "Road To Nowhere", which stitches *Little Creatures*' sonic and thematic references into one glorious tapestry. Opening with the exaltations of a makeshift gospel choir, Byrne celebrates life's journey over a symphony of marching instrumentation, at times jaunty and textural. It's a deft encapsulation of the album's promise: universality amid a vast landscape of diverse sounds and voices, inspiration found in the backyard of America. This simplicity is more salient and profound than any stab at obtuse artiness.

Little Creatures endures as a centered statement by a band at rest, and a bandleader no longer immune to the seduction of home. Its themes were effective. The album went double platinum in the United States, selling more than two million copies. It's not the best Talking Heads album, but it does prove that the band can inhibit a gentler posture without going soft. ▲

"Sometimes we've tried too hard to be on the cutting edge"

After the large ensembles and adventurous movie production, Eno and "ethnic", Talking Heads face a dilemma. "Where do you go from there," ask TINA WEYMOUTH and CHRIS FRANTZ, "without jerking yourself off?" As it turns out, it's to the reassurance of simple songs with strong arrangements. "We thought it would be nice to have songs with proper chord changes again," they tell ADRIAN THRILLS...

BENNO FRIEDMAN/THE LIFE IMAGES COLLECTION VIA GETTY IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

David Byrne, sitting pretty: London 1985

NME JULY 20, 1985

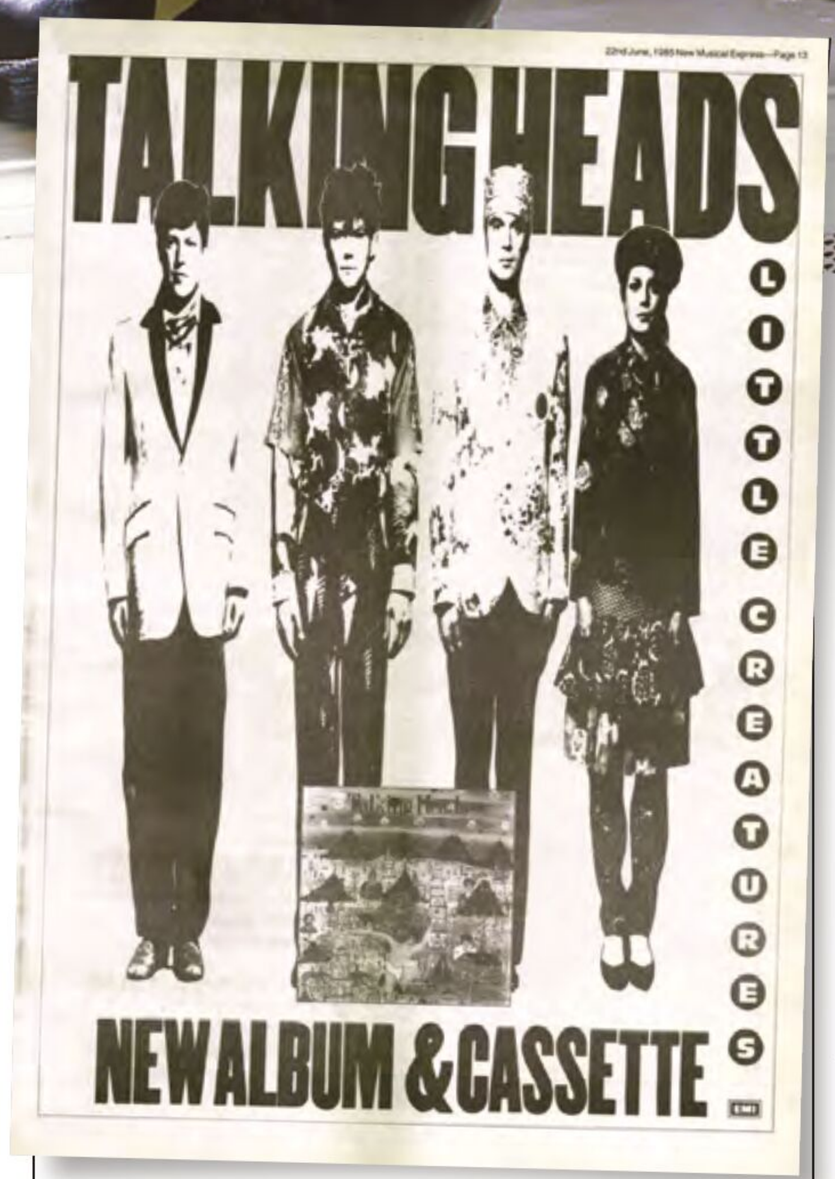
IT'S NOT that they're old. It's just that they've been here a long time.

Ten years ago, almost to the month, Talking Heads made their live debut when they supported the Ramones at CBGB's in New York, so beginning a career of white-art-on-funk adventurism that has produced as many wayward indulgent excesses as it has blue sparks of psychotic pop brilliance.

How ironic, a decade on, that the current frayed-denim resurgence of Da Brudders and their blitzkreig buzzsaw should coincide with a Talking Heads LP that is their most crisp and colourful for years.

Bright but far from bland, *Little Creatures* is a startling return to form. It harks back to the simpler song patterns and urban folk themes that marked their early excellence, discarding the mule train of 'ethnic' musical baggage that provided the polyrhythmic backdrop for both their previous studio album *Speaking In Tongues* and the live soundtrack for *Stop Making Sense*.

Though a wilfully eccentric streak still persists to give the band much of their character, bass-Head Tina Weymouth readily admits that they reverted to a more relaxed, traditional songwriting approach before recording *Creatures*.



"We thought it would be nice to have songs with proper chord changes again. There was no point in trying to top what we had just done, the big band, the big production and the big movie. Where do you go from there without jerking yourself off?

"So when David came to us with the song demos that were just him singing with a guitar, we had an itch to play like that again. So we spent three or four weeks working on the songs, arranging them properly before we went into the studio. We didn't feel any urge to pile a lot of stuff on top of them.

"It was back to basics. It was the first time in five or six years that we knew beforehand exactly where the vocal line was going to be. We actually arranged songs rather than just groove straight through."

BEDECKED IN black, Tina is reclining in a suite of the EMI offices in London. Across the room her husband, drum-Head Chris Frantz, sits impassively behind a desk. Were it not for the giveaway can of Red Stripe in his hand, he could pass for the chairman of the board.

They make a neat New York couple. Just as her taut basslines and his busy drumming provide a weaving rhythmic framework for both the Heads and their Tom Tom Club tributary, so his hearty humour and her more wry banter complement each other well – a good job, as they obviouslysee more of one another than the average married couple.

An irreverent sense of humour is also well to the fore on *Little Creatures*, from the absurd dayglo garb the band wear on the sleeve to the dry wit that punctuates the songs, as Chris explains.

"We were trying to do something that was personal to us, rather than something that was exotic. It was more fun to do than the last album. *Speaking In Tongues* was good to do and we

ILPO MUSTO / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

learnt a lot from the musicians we played with, but *Little Creatures* was a relief in that there wasn't too much pressure on us to be overly serious.

"Sometimes we've tried too hard to be on the cutting edge of popular music. The thing is that we're going to be on the cutting edge whether we try or not, especially with, er, our vocalist being the way he is."

There is the unspoken hint – nothing malicious, understand – that Frantz and Weymouth are not always on the same artistic wavelength as David Byrne. So how do the working relationships break down within the band? Is Byrne a dictator? Are Chris, Tina and guitar/keyboards man Jerry Harrison (currently producing the Violent Femmes) just a vehicle for his fruitcake schemes? Or are the Heads a truly democratic unit?

"David is a very charismatic person, and that's good in a frontman," says Tina. "But we generally write the music together. If somebody in the band doesn't want to do something, nobody pushes them to do it. Everybody has that veto power. We generally manage to convince one another of the validity of doing something. There's a special chemistry in the band, something special between the four people involved."

What about Byrne's humour? With lines about subjects such as "*baby pee-pee*" not translating too readily, it is sometimes a little lost on British ears.

"It's a weird sense of humour wherever you are! But none of us have ever objected to anything David has come out with. He's never come out with garbage. Does pee-pee mean the same over here? In the States it means a little baby's penis. I thought that line was very irreverent and very funny. We've just done a video for that song which is fairly hilarious."

And the cover-shot clothes?

"Those were very tongue-in-cheek. We don't own those clothes. We borrowed them from a store. It was nothing to do with the psychedelic revival. It's meant to look like four naive people dressing up to try to be fashionable. It's funny how some people have actually taken it seriously.

"After our connection with Eno and the whole ethnic thing, we were afraid that people were starting to take us a bit seriously. I think there's a real danger in that. It's not the point of pop music."

Tom Tom Club: waiting for a studio slot back in the Bahamas

WITH A new studio LP in the shops and another already 'in the can' at Sigma Sound in New York – this sequel continuing the themes and moods evoked on *Little Creatures*, but again expanding the musical base to include a heavy metal song and even a waltz – it is a good time to re-evaluate the live film which constituted the bulk of the band's output last year.

At the time, *Stop Making Sense* appeared to be a filler project – an attempt to recreate New Year's Eve on stage with the group treading water as they replenished their creative abilities, Chris, however, sees it differently.

"The point of the movie was to put all that big band stuff – the Afro, Latin and funk thing – into one tiny capsule. If anybody wants to see that now, they can just go and see the film. It frees us to go and do something else."

Another film, this time involving the soon-to-be-reactivated Tom Tom Club, is also in the pipeline, although the timing of the next TTC LP could depend on the availability of their favourite studio, Compass Point in the Bahamas, the subtropical home of so many vintage early-'80s dance classics.

"Compass Point is a great place to have a working vacation," says Tina. "You can go there and get away from business, allergies and pollution. There are no distractions, so you can get a lot of work done. There is also something special about the musicians down there. They are in it for the right reasons. When we were there, we were influencing people like Sly and Robbie and they were influencing us. We were from a fast urban environment and they were from a more mellow, languid musical background. People would play and sing on each other's songs. It was like a little community for a while.

"The trouble was that it got too popular. You can't get into the studio now because it is booked out by people like AC/DC, Trevor Horn and Julio Iglesias! People book it out for months at a time and little acts like Black Uhuru and Tom Tom Club just can't get a look in."

"There's a special chemistry in the band, something special between the four of us"
TINA WEYMOUTH

Along with their own apartment in the Bahamas, however, Chris and Tina also have a small studio in funky Nassau. It is there that they hope to spend the rest of the summer writing and demoing the songs for the new Tom Tom Club LP. Following that it will be back to the Heads and the completion of the second studio set of what Chris calls their "new beginning".

So, as their second decade begins, what is the secret of Talking Heads' longevity?

"I think some of it is just luck," says Chris. "But it's not all luck. Maybe we've also exercised a little better judgement than some others in the people we've got in as managers and agents. We've also never overexposed ourselves. We've never used every form of promotion available to us. When things looked like getting too hectic, we've put on the brakes."

Long may the creatures flourish. ▲

Key player: Jerry Harrison at home in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, August 30, 1985

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES, HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

DAVID BYRNE IN THE 1980s

RELEASED: 1981–1989

Alongside Brian Eno, the Kronos Quartet (and various Talking Heads), Byrne travels the world from the comfort of his studio. *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts* and *Rei Momo* bookend a decade of exciting multi-disciplinary work. BY NIGEL WILLIAMSON

ANYONE LESS restless than David Byrne might have basked in the afterglow following the dazzling risk-taking of Talking Heads' *Fear Of Music*. Yet Byrne and fellow brainiac Brian Eno, who had co-produced the album, knew they had only begun to scratch the surface of the sonic possibilities which their collaboration had opened up on tracks such as "Drugs" and "I Zimbra".

To further their experimental use of the recording studio as compositional tool required a conceptual leap outside the conventional confines of a pop/rock record – and Talking Heads was not the vehicle. The outcome of their extra-curricular adventures was the remarkable **My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts** SIRE/WARNER BROS, 1981 ★★★★★.

The genesis of Byrne's first album away from Talking Heads lay in his discovery of an eclectic cache of field recordings from around the globe which the French ethnographic label Ocora had been releasing since the 1950s.

They included African griots, muezzin calling the faithful to prayer, Iranian folk music and classical Indian recitals, and Byrne shared them excitedly with fellow travellers Eno and John Hassell, whose landmark 1980 album *Fourth World, Vol 1: Possible Musics* can be seen as a contemporary companion piece to *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts*.

The "world music boom" was still some years away, and to Byrne and Eno the Ocora recordings were like a revelation from another planet. In them they heard not only a strange and unfamiliar beauty but music that operated by rules and structures that were radically different from the template of western rock and which exploded their preconceptions of what might constitute music. As Byrne put it, there were a myriad of different musical universes out there and the rock and pop world had been "blinkered by confining itself to only one".

Byrne and Eno discussed making their own field recordings for an album based upon an "imaginary culture" in which they became invisible and were not so much creators as curators. The plan was abandoned as impractical but the nucleus of the idea lingered.

Instead of their own field recordings, they assembled a collection of 'found' voices that included gospel preachers, Arabic pop singers, ethnographic recordings, radio show call-ins, Algerian Muslims chanting verses from the Koran and even a human exorcism.

Around these sampled voices they created a sound-bed played on conventional instruments – albeit in unconventional ways. Guitar cases and cardboard boxes were used as kick drums, biscuit tins became snares and pots and pans provided further assorted percussion. Around the same time Lindsey Buckingham was conducting similar percussive experiments in his home studio as he assembled the backing tracks for Fleetwood Mac's *Tusk*, but Byrne and Eno's vision was substantially more ambitious and far-reaching.

As digital looping had not yet been invented, the sound was layered and textured by playing each part over and over again, "as if we were a human loop", as Byrne put it. Other musicians were brought in as required to ground specific tracks, including Bill Laswell on bass, Robert Fripp on guitar and Chris Frantz on drums. Yet mostly *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts* was a two-handed DIY affair.

With some justification, the album has been credited with having invented sampling. Yet one of the remarkable aspects of the recording is that Byrne and Eno had no access to the sophisticated samplers and sequencers that would soon become commonplace. Instead they relied on a Heath ▶

CRITICS' VERDICT

MY LIFE IN THE BUSH OF GHOSTS

"Throughout, the drums and bass are relentlessly one-dimensional yet at the same time exhilarating; creating, with distant synths and fractured piano motifs, a thick, muscular rush that can be both hypnotic and invigorating." IAN PYE, MELODY MAKER, FEBRUARY 14, 1981

"There's no sense of resonance here, no strangeness, wonderment or mystery, no real consideration for, or understanding of, the subject matter at hand." ANGUS MacKINNON, NME, FEBRUARY 14, 1981

MY LIFE IN THE BUSH OF GHOSTS
BRIAN ENO–DAVID BYRNE

David Byrne
Songs from the Broadway Production of
"The Catherine Wheel"
Choreographed and Directed by Twyla Tharp

ECM
DAVID BYRNE
Music for The Knee Plays
by Robert Wilson and David Byrne
from Robert Wilson's The Civil Wars:
A tree is best measured when it is down

SOUNDS FROM TRUE STORIES · DAVID BYRNE
CARL FINCH · BANDA ECLIPSE · MEREDITH MONK
TERRY ALLEN · KRONOS QUARTET · STEVE JORDAN
A FILM BY
TRUE STORIES
MUSIC FOR ACTIVITIES FREAKS

ORIGINAL MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK
MUSIC BY
RYUICHI SAKAMOTO DAVID BYRNE AND CONG SU
THE LAST EMPEROR

DAVID BYRNE
REI MOMO

Robinson set-up in which, to mix and sync the tracks, they ran two tape machines simultaneously, one containing the music, the other the disembodied 'found' vocals. Stopping and starting the tapes manually to create a mix was a hit-and-miss process – but when it worked the results were serendipitous, sounding as if the "singer" was making a spontaneously emotional response to the music. It was a congruence which Byrne admitted, was "entirely in the ear of the beholder", but it was nonetheless real or authentic for that.

The album's title came from a 1954 novel by the Nigerian writer Amos Tutuol. Byrne hadn't actually read the book but claimed that its narrative of a boy lost for years in a spirit-haunted jungle "seemed to encapsulate what this record was about". At the same time such a nebulous link also offered a convenient way to avoid having to define what the album was about.

Forty years on, *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts* may no longer sound as revolutionary as it once did, yet it has not dated and the radio voice which opens the album with the words *"America is waiting for a message of some sort or another"* seems both contemporary and eerily prescient in 2020.

"Mea Culpa" is a violent sound clash of Kraftwerk, Roxy Music, house beats and distant, scrambled radio voices. "Regiment" is an otherworldly amalgam of the wailing Arabic voice of Dunya Yunis, Frippertronics and Frantz's relentless drumming. "Help Me Somebody" and "Moonlight In Glory" fuse evangelical preachers and gospel singing with funk loops that pre-date Moby's *Play* by two decades.

"The Jezebel Spirit" is perhaps the most extraordinary and unsettling track of all, as exorcism takes to the dance floor, a spooked but all-too-real voice intoning, *"Do you hear voices? You do! So you are possessed!"* over Byrne's scratchy guitar and Eno's synths.

None of it sounds contrived and the world music elements sound eerie and compelling rather than worthy and woke. Inevitably some raised question marks about cultural misappropriation and imperialist manipulation, nowhere more so than on "Qu'ran". When the album was released, the Muslim Council Of Great Britain complained that putting grooves to the chanting of sacred texts was blasphemous and Byrne and Eno agreed to drop the track from future pressings. It has never been reinstated and was excluded even from the album's expanded 2006 reissue, which added seven previously unreleased tracks.

Difficulties in clearing the samples meant that *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts* was delayed for more than a year, so it failed to appear until after the next Talking Heads album had been recorded. The disrupted sequence was unfortunate, because *Remain In Light* could not have happened without *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts*, the experimental success of which gave Byrne the confidence to apply similarly radical techniques to the making of a pop record.

It was only a matter of time before he began composing for the stage, for after his move to New York in 1974, Byrne had spent as much time frequenting the city's avant-garde theatre venues as at CBGB's. Such collaborations have become a mainstay of his career since the choreographer Twyla Tharp, whose previous ballets included *Deuce Coupe* to the music of The Beach Boys, gave Byrne his first theatrical commission when she asked him to score for her ballet **The Catherine Wheel** SIRE, 1981 ★★★★.

Collaborating symbiotically with Tharp, Byrne immersed himself totally in the project for six months. Some pieces were composed to order to accompany Tharp's dance steps; on other occasions it was the opposite way around, with Byrne's music inspiring her choreography.

The work was strongly informed by his recent reading of *African Rhythm And African Sensibility* by the American musicologist John Miller Chernoff. So taken was he with the book that he invited Chernoff to contribute drum patterns to the score. Blending African rhythms with angular post-punk guitars, distorted funk and atmospheric electronics, he was joined on the accompanying soundtrack album by Jerry Harrison, Bernie Worrell, Eno, Adrian Belew and Tharp herself, who was credited with playing a pan of water.

Many of the pieces were instrumental, but several of the songs with vocals were subsequently performed live by Talking Heads, including "Big Business" and "What A Day That Was", both of which featured in the band's 1984's concert film *Stop Making Sense*.

BYRNE'S NEXT theatrical collaboration could not have been more different when he was one of several composers, alongside Philip Glass and Gavin Bryars, recruited by Robert Wilson to contribute to his five-act opera *The Civil Wars: A Tree Is Best Measured When It Is Down*. Byrne's offering consisted of a dozen musical interludes for a brass ensemble, which Wilson planned to use during set changes between the opera's main scenes.

Intended to be premiered at the 1984 Olympic Games, a lack of funding meant the opera was never staged in its entirety, but Byrne's music appeared on the album **Music For 'The Knee Plays'** ECM 1985, ★★★. Inspired by the Dirty Dozen Brass Band, he scored the pieces in a variety of different styles, many of them with a strong flavour of New Orleans, over which he added surreal spoken-word narrations, shot through with whip-smart aphorisms. *"In the future there will be so much going on that no-one will be able to keep track of it,"* he prophesised on the closing track. The music didn't make it onto CD until 2007 and it's unlike anything else in his oeuvre.

Sounds From True Stories SIRE, 1986, ★★★ is another oddity, a spin-off from Byrne's film *True Stories* and the Talking Heads album of the same name. Containing incidental music from the movie, only half the tracks feature Byrne – with Kronos Quartet, Tex-Mex accordionist Steve Jordan and polka king Carl Finch among the performers. Several of the pieces are instrumental versions of songs that appeared on the accompanying Talking Heads album.

He also contributed a handful of short instrumental pieces to the score for Bertolucci's **The Last Emperor** VIRGIN, 1987, ★★★. The movie won nine Oscars, including one for Best Original Score, which Byrne shared with his fellow contributors Ryuichi Sakamoto and the Chinese composer Cong Su, although he contributed no more than 15 minutes to the soundtrack album, smartly blending oriental and western tropes.

By the end of the decade Byrne's promiscuous art-rock aesthetic had taken another swerve in the direction of South America and the islands of the Caribbean. In truth, it didn't require a long journey, as New York boasted a vibrant Latin music scene in which every kind of style was represented, from Brazilian samba and Colombian cumbia to Afro-Cuban rumba and merengue from the Dominican Republic via Puerto Rican bomba and classic boleros.

Byrne had taken to hanging out in the city's Latin clubs, and the experience inspired him to launch his own label Luaka Bop on which he began to issue compilations of his favourite Latin recordings. Unsurprisingly, his passion

CRITICS' VERDICT

REI MOMO

"The songs on *Rei Momo* are actaully quite engaging, with thier churning polyrhythms and breezy, vivacious horn charts, but there's always David Byrne's cold-fish vocal, the sound of a man squeezing out a recalcitrant turd, to remind us that this is 'boundary breaking' work at the 'cutting edge' of post-modern art."
SIMON REYNOLDS, MELODY MAKER, OCTOBER 14, 1989

"It's unmistakeably a David Byrne album... obviously a hard thought-out labour of love designed to introduce the uninitiated to a whole sweet trolley full of Latin dance styles.... It is the further adventures of a New York fruitbat flapping happily out of the rainforest, grafting his worldview onto a Brazillian soundscape. Neither fish nor flesh, neither masterpiece nor monstrosity."
LEN BROWN, NME, OCTOBER 28, 1989

REI MOMO WAS A FITTINGLY EXPANSIVE WAY TO END THE MOST PRODUCTIVELY CREATIVE DECADE OF HIS CAREER

also seeped into his own music and while making Talking Heads' final album *Naked*, he recruited Angel Fernandez, best known for his work with salsa legend Ray Barretto, to arrange a Latin horn section on "Mr Jones". He was so taken with the results that he determined that his first post-Talking Heads album would be a pan-Latin record that ambitiously reflected all of the dance styles he had fallen in love with from across the diaspora of the New World's slave legacy.

It was a bold decision, for as Byrne noted, in those pre-Buena Vista Social Club days, fans were still heavily segregated, so that "rock audiences were by and large white; funk, Latin and R&B audiences were not". The mission Byrne set himself was to bring the two together.

Byrne in the early '80s: finding the confidence to apply radical techniques to pop

To this purpose, the songs he wrote for 1989's **Rei Momo** SIRE/LUAKA BOP ★★★★ (a Portuguese term from Brazil meaning "king of the carnival") were all given English rather than Spanish lyrics, full of his customary oddball wit. *"Now and then I get horny, at night you do,"* he sang over a cumbia rhythm, setting the tone on opener "Independence Day". *"Women have their world and men have ours/ We're into sports and they're into flowers,"* he slyly noted a few tracks later on "Women Vs Men".

Assisted again by Fernandez, he populated the songs with the cream of New York's Latin musicians, among them Johnny Pacheco and Willie Colón of Fania All-Stars fame. Fellow Latin enthusiast Kirsty MacColl added vocals to a trio of tracks and Byrne also included "Loco De Amor", a storming duet with the 'Queen of Salsa' Celia Cruz, which he had written and recorded for Jonathan Demme's 1986 movie *Something Wild*.

As a primer in the contrasting panoply of Latin styles, *Rei Momo* works brilliantly. As a quirkily engaging Byrne pop record it's even better, and a fittingly expansive way to end the most productively creative decade of his career. ▲

SLEEVENOTES

MY LIFE IN THE BUSH OF GHOSTS

Released: February 1981
Label: Sire
Produced by: Brian Eno, David Byrne
Recorded at: RMP, Sigma, Blue Rock, NYC; Eldorado, LA; Different Fur, SF
Highest chart position: UK 29; US 44

THE CATHERINE WHEEL

Released: December 1981
Label: ECM/EMI – Regal Zonophone/Nonesuch
Produced by: David Byrne
Recorded at: Celestial Sound, Chicago; Olympic, London
Highest chart position: UK –; US 104

MUSIC FOR 'THE KNEE PLAYS'

Released: May 1985
Label: Sire
Produced by: David Byrne
Recorded at: One On One, Studio Sound Recorders, LA
Highest chart position: UK –; US 141

SOUNDS FROM TRUE STORIES

Released: 1986
Label: Sire
Produced by: various
Recorded at: various
Highest chart position: UK –; US –

THE LAST EMPEROR

Released: 1987
Label: Virgin
Produced by: Ryuichi Sakamoto, David Byrne
Recorded at: Onkio Haus, Kato, Aoyama, CBS/Sony Roppongi Studios, Japan; Abbey Road, Odyssey, Lillie Yard Studios, London; Electric Lady, NYC
Highest chart position: UK –; US 152

REI MOMO

Released: October 3, 1989
Label: Luaka Bop/Sire
Produced by: David Byrne, Steve Lillywhite
Recorded at: Right Track Studios, NYC
Highest chart position: UK 52; US 71

JOE STEVENS

TRUE STORIES

RELEASED: SEPTEMBER 15, 1986

David Byrne creates songs for his movie characters. Frantz ("nice drums"), Weymouth and Harrison help turn this essentially solo expedition to the US heartland into a group excursion. BY TERRY STAUNTON

DAVID BYRNE'S fascination with ordinary people can be traced back to Talking Heads' early days. "Found A Job", from 1978's *More Songs About Buildings And Food*, unwittingly predicted the wave of scripted reality TV exemplified by *Made In Chelsea* or *The Only Way Is Essex* ("*Judy's in the bedroom inventing situations*"), but it came to full fruition in his film *True Stories*, a fictionalised celebration of the oddballs that fill the pages of supermarket tabloids, the kind of misfits that would, in a few short years, be afforded their own fly-on-the-wall series on cable networks.

The frontman had wanted his directorial bow to be more of a group affair, but Chris Frantz and Tina Weymouth politely declined his invitation to make their acting debuts after learning their characters were named in the screenplay as "Pimp" and "Whore". Instead, while Byrne and a movie crew were location shooting in the suburbs of Dallas, the rest of the band went straight from mixing *Little Creatures* to adding flesh to the bones of the songs he'd already written to accompany sundry self-contained vignettes in the film.

Had he been given a choice, however, Byrne might not have made the album. He'd originally envisioned a soundtrack release featuring the film's thespians (which would emerge as *Sounds From True Stories* [see p69]), but paymasters at Sire Records feared the shooting, post-production and promotion of a side project would have meant an unacceptable delay before another Heads record was in shops.

Consequently, with the leader at least partly relinquishing the often dictatorial control of yore, *True Stories*, the album, was by necessity a more collaborative effort than its immediate predecessors, a state of affairs regarded by some members as vital to the band's continued existence. "At this point Tina and I were doing our best to keep the band together," Frantz writes in his autobiography *Remain In Love*. "During the recording of the basic tracks David gave me the only compliment he had ever given me since I met him. After he heard the playback to 'Puzzlin' Evidence' he said to no-one in particular 'nice drums'."

Indeed, Frantz's drums have rarely been so to the fore on a Talking Heads album, from the pounding pop metal of opener "Love For Sale" to the driving college-rock anthem "Wild Wild Life" (which would be their last brush with the US Top 40 singles chart), the junkyard calypso of "Hey Now" and the township rattle of "Radio Head". More often than not, they provide a backbone that gives the impression of a band playing as a cohesive live unit, especially when held up against the building-block multi-tracking that prevailed on several tracks from *Remain In Light* or *Speaking In Tongues*.

A key to the material's comparative simplicity, Byrne suggested to *Rolling Stone* magazine, was a more detached emotional investment, the singer himself less in the spotlight as the mouthpiece. "When I had to write these songs that fit the characters and situations, it made it easier than it had been for a number of years, because the point of view, the energy level, the style was already set out for me. It became a kind of craftsmanlike thing; it took the responsibility of the words and music away from me."

In that respect, the nascent film director is, to all intents and purposes, more of an actor than he's ever been before, lending his own vocal to characters that had already been constructed on the pages of a screenplay. He's a convincing sideshow barker/voodoo preacher on the maniacal gris-gris groove of "Pap Legba" ("*There is a queen of sixes, sevens and nines/Dust in your garden, poison in your mind*"), while a more uncertain, paranoid evangelism inhabits the pulpit pounder in "Puzzlin' Evidence".

It's a pleasure to hear Byrne cast as a hangdog perennial loser-in-love on "People Like Us", the plaintive vulnerability in his voice teased even

CRITICS' VERDICT

"The songs gradually retreat from the staccato girders of a tenement helter-skelter toward the barren, tranquil sway of the Lone Star State – the film's location. From the carnival romp of 'Wild Wild Life' to the steel guitars and aqueous refrain of 'People Like Us', Talking Heads interweave intimacy wth imitation and bisect a cross-section of 'real life'."

TED MICO, MELODY MAKER, SEPTEMBER 13, 1986

TALKING HEADS

TRACKMARKS

1. Love For Sale ★★★★
2. Puzzlin' Evidence ★★★
3. Hey Now ★★★
4. Papa Legba ★★★★
5. Wild Wild Life ★★★★
6. Radio Head ★★★★
7. Dream Operator ★★★
8. People Like Us ★★★★
9. City Of Dreams ★★★

Label: EMI (UK), Sire (US)
Produced by: Talking Heads
Recorded at: Sigma Sound, NYC; O Henry Sound, Toluca Lake, CA; Studio Southwest, Sunnyvale, Texas; Arcadia, Dallas, Texas
Personnel: David Byrne (guitar, vocals), Chris Frantz (drums), Jerry Harrison (guitars, keys, backing vocals), Tina Weymouth (bass, bk vcl), Tommy Camfield (fiddle), Paulinho Da Costa (perc), Steve Jordan (accordion), Tommy Morrell (pedal steel), Gloria Loring, Bert Cross Choir, St Thomas Aquinas Elementary School Choir (bk vcl)
Highest chart position: UK 7; US 17

further to the fore by pedal steel guitar similar to the redneck detour taken on "Creatures Of Love" from *Little Creatures*. There are additional country hues on the sparse waltz of "Dream Operator", albeit closer in spirit to the existential angst that peppered some of the cuts on *Fear Of Music*, as is the hymnal "City Of Dreams", which even in isolation from the film for which it was written sounds like it should be played over a closing credit roll.

THE EXCURSIONS towards myriad paths of Americana are enthusiastically pounced upon by Frantz, Weymouth and Jerry Harrison, although the polyrhythmic sensibilities of "Radio Head" (from which Thom Yorke and chums took their name), "Papa Legba" or "Hey Now" are nonetheless kept in check. Ironically, the absence of over-egged, complicated flights of fancy fuelled some reviewers' suspicions that Talking Heads were, by and large, phoning it in, while Sire seized on the most straightforward 'rock' tracks, "Wild Wild Life" and "Love For Sale", to release as singles.

"WILD WILD LIFE" COULD HAVE BEEN LIFTED FROM ANY OF THE GROUP'S '70S ALBUMS

In particular, "Wild Wild Life" and its no-nonsense verse-chorus structure could have been lifted from any of the group's '70s albums, but had it appeared back then we would not have had the delights of its heavy-MTV-rotation promo clip. The sight of a Madonna impersonator among the parade of lip-synching wannabes might be construed as Sire biting the hand that feeds, but the true star of the show is Harrison, hamming it up to the hilt in various guises, including Prince, Billy Idol and Kid Creole.

It's a curious contradiction that after years of increasing diviseness Talking Heads should sound more like an equal-billing, democratic band on an album which, for the first time, credits Byrne as the sole writer of every track. It's perhaps even more remarkable considering Byrne's frequent absences from the studio, especially at the mixing stage, the polymath displaying a continued restlessness with the constraints of a group dynamic. Frantz and Weymouth may have been working hard to keep them together, and did a bang-up job on a great set of songs, but for many observers the end was rapidly homing into view. ▲

Hat's entertainment: Byrne models the JR Ewing Stetson, 1986

TCD/PROD.DB / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

"There's nothing wrong with hybridising things"

Merging documentary, drama, satire and musical, DAVID BYRNE's directorial debut *True Stories* is a patchwork piece exploring consumerism, democracy, technology and Texan hick cliché. "It's laughing with them," pop's Renaissance man tells MAT SNOW, "what I'm actually saying is that I like this."

NME SEPTEMBER 6, 1986

COMING SOON to a cinema near you is one of this year's funniest yet most thought-provoking films. It is called *True Stories*, and is a mosaic of pilfered, hybridised ideas and images which add up to a surprisingly coherent whole.

Its director and co-writer is a slim, 34-year-old New Yorker of casually smart attire, faintly greying black hair and the deepest cow-brown eyes I've ever seen.

He is David Byrne, who for the last 11 years has been otherwise employed as singer, guitarist and songwriter for the rock group Talking Heads.

Rock stars making movies? Never mind such half-baked dilettanti as Bowie, Dylan and Prince; David Byrne proves that in this age of over-specialisation the Renaissance Ideal remains bloody but unbowed. The Jonathan Miller of pop, anyone? ►

Big in his field: *True Stories*, 1986

IT ALL started back when Talking Heads were touring in 1983, as immortalised in Jonathan Demme's award-winning documentary *Stop Making Sense*. David Byrne used to divert himself from the rigours of the road by collecting those kooky believe-it-or-not anecdotes that form the staple of such American tabloid newspapers as the *Weekly World News*. "Baby Born With Two Heads!", "Boy Whose Earmuffs Took World By Storm!", that sort of thing.

At the same time, Byrne was already increasingly interested in the theatrical and cinematic arts as exemplified by the *Stop Making Sense* stageshow and the promotional videos he directed with dazzling inventiveness for "Burning Down The House", "This Must Be The Place" and "Road To Nowhere". He was now thinking in visual images, which he would sketch and store for some future use.

Thus the raw material for *True Stories*, an unreliable anthology if literal verisimilitude is what you're after. But not quite pure fiction either.

True Stories defies a ready pigeon-hole, combining several genres: documentary, satire, musical, drama, and fantasy. Robert Altman's *Nashville*, Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* and the films of Fellini offer a few cross-references.

Threading through all of these is our host/narrator, David Byrne himself. Whether on an amiable stroll through town or, even more uncharacteristically of this erstwhile paragon of brainily twitching nerdishness, relaxed at the wheel of his open-top car, Byrne's coathanger frame is racily upholstered in a sharpshooting suit, bootlace tie, hand-tooled cowboy boots and high, wide and handsome Stetson hat.

Why does he look like JR Ewing, the archetypal Texan down at the ranch? To puncture the myth that bronco-bucking shmatte is de rigueur in Texas; only showbiz Texans look so corny, a small but telling point. David Byrne sets *True Stories* in the biggest state of the Big Country, not as a New York sharpie mocking the hicks, but the better to tackle the big themes.

What are these big themes? In a roundabout, light-fingered yet penetrating style, some of the facts of life of America today.

"TEXAS DID seem to embody a lot of what I was getting at. You had to be very careful about not dragging up a load of Texan clichés. I did try to play with them sometimes. Putting myself in a cowboy outfit was pointing out one of the Texas clichés – that only the out-of-towners think that Texas is filled with cowboys. And we only mentioned oil once!"

He laughs with a bemused inward furtiveness, his discourse always tending to the face-value deadpan style patented by Andy Warhol. But cautious judgements poke through all the time.

"I've just returned to New York after being in either Texas or Los Angeles the last two years, and it's nice to be back. I think I'm familiar enough to get along in the rest of the country, but foreign enough that I still go about kind of bemused when I visit other towns in a lot of America. It's nice that I still find it fresh."

Would not the great mass of Americans resent being represented by an artist from precious pinko liberal New York City?

"Yeah, and they're completely justified in that. A lot of New Yorkers think of the rest of the country as a bunch of laughable hicks, although my hope is that you can get a laugh out of them and that they do have something to offer. It's like laughing with them."

There is much to laugh with. Virgil is the collective Texan new town of Byrne's devising: we tour its geography, architecture, economy, pastimes and especially people with a raised eyebrow worthy of [*BBC TV's resident globetrotter*] Alan Whicker.

"I felt that I had to keep reminding myself and the audience that a lot of the time though it may look freakish, what I'm actually saying is that I like this. What this person's doing is actually very creative or avant-garde or whatever, but coming from an unsophisticated background. And that deserves some attention or respect."

How, hypothetically, might a Texan filmmaker represent New York?

"Hmmm," pauses the ever-thoughtful Byrne. "One of the things that they would notice right away is the dirt. The London dirt is old, centuries of soot. But New York's dirt is last week's garbage. It's a different feeling; soot doesn't smell so much! Texans would notice how filthy New York is, and how you have these sophisticated people dressing up and going to expensive restaurants, and then you have bums sleeping in doorways and garbage all over the place."

Has his view of "The Big Country" changed since he sang in 1978 that *"I wouldn't live there if you paid me"*?

"No. I've always felt that, depending on what

AF ARCHIVE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

side of the bed you wake upon, you can either look out the window and see things rosy, amusing and wonderful, or you can see it as imperfect and compromised."

That David Byrne is reasonable to a fault makes for slightly bloodless conversation. "Gosh!" is the only outburst he permits himself, and wryness is just about his strongest response.

On the other hand, such self-effacement allows him to subordinate his ego to the demands of the movie. For instance, though all the songs in the film are to be found on the new Talking Heads LP, also titled *True Stories*, they are mostly versions performed by the actors and local gospel, norteno and country musicians. Where Talking Heads actually sing – on the new single "Wild, Wild Life" – what you actually see on film is a hilarious mime competition of the type that has been catching on in nightclubs all over America. And when the band finally get to appear, playing "Love For Sale", they're swiftly deluged in molten chocolate, a metaphor for conspicuous consumption if ever there was one.

But is it also a metaphor for the eclipse of Talking Heads? Just as David Byrne's interests have diversified into scoring modern dance productions, directing videos and now a full-length movie, so too have I found Talking Heads music less and less gripping. Last year's *Little Creatures* LP bopped and joked cheerfully on the right side of monotony, but it didn't exactly stretch the envelope of the band's ability either, unlike their first four diversely brilliant albums.

The backing tracks for the *True Stories* LP were laid down at the same time as *Little Creatures*, and then the aforementioned Texan "found" musicians did their stuff on top, and the actors sang Byrne's songs as written specifically to express their characters as in any opera or musical. Their renditions burst into life with all the twists and nuances no single band or singer could summon. It is curious, then, that Talking Heads should recut the same songs for *True Stories*, inevitably with less lively results.

"Given the choice, I discovered a lot of people would rather hear me singing them, which I find disappointing. I find that sometimes people in the film did something more appropriate to the song, like the guy who played Louis Fyne (John Goodman), his voice gave a more authentic country interpretation of that song ("People Like Us") than I did.

"But it's also true that a lot of people like to hear the person who wrote the song sing it. So I just felt we were obliged to do it, though I didn't need my arm twisted that much, ha ha!"

"A lot of New Yorkers think of the rest of the country as a bunch of laughable hicks"
DAVID BYRNE

David Byrne admits how the rest of the band are wary that their new LP seems to be a mere adjunct – commercial guarantee, perhaps – of his grandiose solo project. For *True Stories* shouldn't be seen as only a brief diversion from Byrne's main job as head Head. On the strength of his video experience, he raised the one-million dollar shooting budget from his American record company Warner Brothers. The post-production costs, calculated at between a further one and four million dollars (the final sums are yet to be done), were footed by mainstream movie investment. Though still less than half of the Hollywood average of 10-million bucks per movie, nor is it peanuts either. Likewise David Byrne's two-year commitment of time.

Such a demanding solo project could only be fitted into the band's schedule given that the songwriting and recording process is not very time-consuming. But Talking Heads haven't toured in three years, nor have any plans to do so until they can think of a novel presentation. So David Byrne feels no urge to play to a live crowd for its own sake?

"I probably do, but I forget how much fun it is until I do it, to sing in front of people and they actually like it, ha ha! I forget how enjoyable that is."

Meanwhile, he is keen to make more movies, though as yet with nothing specific in mind. Perhaps less music and more story...

"I started off reading old myths and ones not so old but not so well-known, like American Indian legends, the creation myth of the Navajo, something like that. There's some good material there; some of it is kind of sexy but fantastic at the same time..."

THE NEW patriotism is also a trick. It's a real frightening, scary trick that everyone wants so badly to believe is true. The government is selling the country down the river. The real wealth of the country is in the people.

Empires in retreat get into some pretty weird stuff. Egypt, Rome, England, Japan, Spain, and now the United States. They get this intense pride and nostalgia for what they imagine they were because they can see it slipping away. America had a lot of free money for a long time. Money that just came out of the ground. In Texas it just shot right out of the ground. All you had to do was look around and find it. When cheap labour ran out we just brought some more from overseas. The expansion got a little out of hand, but it's over now. Some of us might have seen the tail end of the heyday, but now most of us can feel reality settling in. Some people think it's the end of the world...
– DAVID BYRNE IN TRUE STORIES, THE BOOK OF THE FILM

In amongst the jokily exploding Texan myths and meditations upon high technology and cities and roads, deeper themes emerge. David Byrne states baldly in the book what he mirthfully dramatises in the movie. Like, whatever happened to American ideals?

"They're kind of empty at the moment, just slogans. In the film I've tried to show that some of them can be thought of as somewhat real – tolerance of difference."

In the film's keynote song, "People Like Us", the amiably everyman character Louis Fyne sings, "*People like us/Gonna*

True Stories: (l-r) Annie McEnroe, Amy Buffinton, Spalding Gray, Richard Dowlearn and David Byrne, 1986

Authentic voice: John Goodman as Louis Fyne in *True Stories*

EVERETT COLLECTION INC / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO, TCD/PROD.DB / ALAMY STOCK

Driving force: feeling the Byrne in *True Stories*

***make it because/We don't want freedom/We don't want justice/We just want someone to love...*" Are most people so preoccupied with their immediate needs that they abdicate civic and democratic responsibilities?**
"Mmm-hmm. People really do want more immediate gratification, and the song puts it kind of bluntly. I think it works in the song but it would be difficult to admit that, that they'd prefer to have a comfortable sofa and an evening watching television than freedom of the press or whatever."

Are those freedoms taken for granted?
"Yeah, I suppose so. People of my generation seem to be more concerned with their careers than anything else. It seems to be a little bit out of proportion. I think it must change eventually. That a whole generation of people would submit to being called 'yuppies' – I don't think they'd put up with that. I think they'd rather change their lifestyle than admit to being a yuppie. It sounds so horrible! Even if it's a comfortable life, it sounds such a derogatory term."

Everything "sounds", "seems", "if" with David Byrne, as if he's separated from reality by a hypothetical wall of contingency. Has he ever actually met anyone who admits to being a yuppie?
"No, ha, ha, I don't think so. I know that I like of lot of the same things that yuppies are supposed to like. I might like a particular meal, then I'll read in the paper that it's a very 'yuppie' meal. I can't help it if it tastes good! What else? Oh yeah. I was working out of LA and I bought a used Volvo that was very cheap, and then I read that the Volvo is considered a very 'yuppie' car. So I felt, gosh, I'm treading on dangerous ground here!"

Since World War II in North America, concentrations of capital spilled out along new federally subsidised highways, covered old countryside with a new suburbia and concentrated around interchanges. And there we find the profitable new malls...

Shopping had become the chief cultural activity in "our united states of shopping".

– GRADY CLAY, THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW, 1985.

In True Stories, are you saying that today's American democracy now boils down to freedom of the consumer's choice?
"Ha ha!"

Do you celebrate shopping or condemn it?
"I think I'm celebrating, but exaggerating it to the point where it becomes amusing. But you're right: a lot of the responsibility part of democracy has been removed and the licence part gets emphasised.

"Democracy is just a licence to manufacture or sell anything you please or dress however you want. Not that most people exercise it. It leads to a lot of kooks!"

The farmer sketched out the extent of the Trilateral Commission control over the economy, the media, and education – they control, he said, either directly or indirectly, IBM, Kodak, the Chase Manhattan Bank, Exxon, Mobil, General Electric, the Bank of America, Equitable Life, the Ford Foundation, the Carnegie Foundation, ITT, American Motors, Safeway, Time Inc, NBC, CBS, the New York Times, the Washington Post, Pillsbury, General Foods, Coca-Cola, and many, many more...

– NICHOLAS LEMANN, TEXAS MONTHLY, 1978.

It's not what you know, it's who you know. Everybody believes in some conspiracy or other. The ones you believe in seem completely plausible. The ones you don't believe in seem like they were thought up by a bunch of nuts and kooks. Can one person be a conspiracy? Was supermarket barcoding prophesied in the Bible?

– DAVID BYRNE, TRUE STORIES.

"There's one man in particular who goes around talking to small communities, mainly the farmers and people who've been having a hard time of it lately. He convinces them it's the Rockefellers and the Trilateral Commission who are at fault, who have caused the banks to hold onto their money. There's an element of truth in some of what he says. I don't believe the Trilateral Commission has a masterplan – I don't think they're chummy enough!"

Are the prophets of Apocalypse still going strong? "Stronger than ever. I think they have more than ever to point to now. To them it's very obvious that AIDS is either the wrath of Heaven or else a CIA experiment gone wrong. Religious TV networks are full of people expecting the Apocalypse every day and pointing to the signs. And Reagan says he believes it as well, which is kind of terrifying. He sees world destruction as inevitable, and it's just a matter of waiting it out."

HAS IT bugged you when you've been accused of ethno-cultural tourism in your music?
"Yeah, it bugged me, but I couldn't defend myself because it's true to some extent. I don't think there's anything wrong with it; it's just how well you do it. So that would be my own defence. There's nothing wrong with hybridising things, mixing them, stealing little bits and adding them to something else. If you do it well, it's all right. If you don't do it well, better leave it alone. When we got criticised, it was partly, I guess, that we weren't doing it good enough."

Partly also, he admits, that for some critics New York intellectuals by definition can't do anything right. But David Byrne can live with that attitude.

Flipping the hybrid coin, how about Prince?

"I still like his records. In the States it's really difficult for a black performer to be accepted by whites on their own turf. The last one would have been Jimi Hendrix, and he wasn't quite as funky. Sadly there's a large number of black performers in the States who would like nothing better than to 'go white', to play Vegas and do soppy ballads... I'm generalising."

> **"I forget how much fun it is until I sing in front of people and they actually like it, ha ha!"**
> **DAVID BYRNE**

How much is the black tradition of "body music" to do with white stereotyping?
"That's true to some extent. But there is some black culture that fosters a different attitude to dance. In black culture there's a lot more physical contact."

Is white culture getting more physical? "Yeah, I think they've loosened up a little bit!"

And maybe the one-time uptight white culture-vulture is loosening up a bit too. The Jonathan Miller of pop? I think he's barely started. ▲

TCD/PROD.DB / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

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PART 2 1977 –89

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NAKED

RELEASED: MARCH 15, 1988

Back to an old way of doing things, for the final time. An effort to rekindle collective magic sparks intermittently, but can't relight the band's fire. BY STEPHEN DEUSNER

NAKED WASN'T supposed to be Talking Heads' Book of Revelations. The album wasn't intended to mark the end of anything, much less the band itself. Rather, the four members conceived it almost as a return to Eden, an opportunity to revisit an old and more equitable way of writing lyrics and making music. For much of the 1980s, David Byrne had brought songs to Chris Frantz, Jerry Harrison and Tina Weymouth for them to soundtrack, which gave Talking Heads the appearance of a visionary artist with his support group in tow. That approach had produced a string of solid hits, but it had created some tensions between them.

In an earlier time, the four musicians had worked up songs together, often finding an interesting musical theme or rhythmic groove that served as a springboard for words and melodies. So they started sessions for *Naked* by jamming for hours at Weymouth and Frantz's old loft in Long Island City, where they had written and recorded 1979's *Fear Of Music*. From those sessions they developed the ideas they would ship over to Paris, where they would flesh out the songs with producer Steve Lillywhite and an orchestra of West African musicians assembled by the multi-instrumentalist Wally Badarou (an associate of the synthpop band Level 42 and a session player for a wide range of artists).

That wasn't all they packed for Paris. Frantz and Weymouth brought along their two young children, while Harrison was accompanied by his wife and newborn. Often the families would show up at Studio Davout, an old theatre recently transformed into a recording facility. The presence of several very small human beings may have informed the tone of Byrne's songs, although he'd written previously in a similarly childlike tone. But these new tracks were more extroverted in their existential musings, as Byrne ponders the great social and environmental upheavals awaiting the human race in the very near and the very distant future. "*Round and round and we won't let go,*" he sings on "Ruby, Dear", referring to all of us stuck on this rock. "*Where we stop, no-one knows.*"

The music, especially on the album's first side, has a grandiloquent buzz, a madcap energy that suits Byrne's odd story-songs and character sketches. Opener "Blind" bops along on a conspiratorial groove and a horn chart that's part Fela, part Stax, with the frontman singing in a rasp like a colouring-book gangster. Sounding like a dayglo production of *Oklahoma!*, "Totally Nude" chases a suburbanite who finds freedom by stripping out of his business suit and running naked in the woods, and it serves as a sly parody of the old Nat "King" Cole chestnut "Nature Boy", another song about finding weird wisdom among the lesser civilised. Similarly, "Mr Jones", with its punchy Latin horns and Jacques Tati flair, could be Talking Heads' response to Dylan's "Ballad Of A Thin Man", except this Mr Jones isn't asked to question the social and moral rules he's followed all of his life. Instead, they instill him with a sense of happiness and fulfillment.

That beautiful marriage of slippery words and jumpy sounds culminates in "(Nothing But) Flowers", as fine a song as Talking Heads ever recorded. Weymouth's bass takes lead, bending notes into a question mark at the beginning and then holding down a percolating groove. Byrne sets our expectations askew: rather than celebrate the natural world, he laments that civilisation has been overtaken by Eden, as though a love of shopping malls and factories were as ingrained in our DNA as our need for mountains and rivers. "*This was a discount store,*" he declares. "*Now it's turned into a cornfield.*" As the guitars wrap around the instrumental coda like vines reclaiming a Pizza Hut, the song makes clear that this is not a prelapsarian paradise but a post-apocalyptic Earth.

"(Nothing But) Flowers" closes the first side of *Naked*, and the second side opens with one of the biggest buzzkills in the band's catalogue. "The Democratic Circus" prunes away all that musical foliage – all those horn flares, trampoline basslines, twining guitar runs, bustling percussion – until a darker, more austere sound remains. Byrne's lyrics are nakedly straightforward, comparing American politics to the big top,

CRITICS' VERDICT

"You get sick of blithely hurling superlatives at Talking Heads, but while they burn so gloriously in the face of their tamely furrowed peers, there's little choice. *Naked* is wildly giddy, terrfiyingly mundane and very nearly perfect. Drown youself in honey, sugar."
PAUL MATHUR, MELODY MAKER, MARCH 12, 1988

"A triumph of post-*Graceland* receptivity and discovery, *Naked* utilises a bewildering array of musicians from Algerian Rai exiles to Zairean Soukous firepower... It even has a Pogue and former Smith... The beauty and wonder of it all is how these musicians blend and empathise."
GAVIN MARTIN, NME, MARCH 12, 1988

TRACKMARKS

1. Blind ★★★★
2. Mr Jones ★★★★
3. Totally Nude ★★★★
4. Ruby Dear ★★★
5. (Nothing But) Flowers ★★★★★
6. The Democratic Circus ★
7. The Facts of Life ★★
8. Mommy Daddy You and I ★★
9. Big Daddy ★★
10. Bill ★★★
11. Cool Water ★★★★

Produced by: Steve Lillywhite, Talking Heads
Recorded at: Studio Davout, Paris; Sigma Sound, New York City
Personnel includes: David Byrne (vocals, guitar, keyboards), Jerry Harrison (piano, marimba, organ), Tina Weymouth (bass, keys, flute), Chris Frantz (drums), Al Acosta (sax), Wally Badarou (keys), Johnny Marr (guitar), Kirsty MacColl (vocals), Eric Weissberg (pedal steel, dobro), Arthur Russell (cello), Manolo Badrena (percussion), Don Brooks (harmonica), Moussa Cissokho (percussion), Steve Elfon (sax), Robin Eubanks (trombone), James Fearnley (accordion), Angel Fernandez (trumpet), Laurie Frink (trumpet), Earl Gardner (trumpet), Nino Gioia (percussion), Steve Gluzband (trumpet), Stan Harrison (sax), José Jerez (trumpet), Mory Kanté (kora), Abdou M'Boup (percussion), Yves N'Djock (guitar), Lenny Pickett (sax), Bobby Porcelli (sax), Steve Sachs (sax), Philippe Servain (accordion), Dale Turk (trombone), Brice Wassy (perc), Sydney Thiam (perc), Charlie Sepulveda (trumpet), Alex Haas (whistling)
Highest chart position: UK 3; US 19

complete with clowns and acrobats and Secret Service guards. Even considering they made the record at the tail end of the Reagan years, the imagery is obvious, the targets too easy.

It's a horrible introduction to this second side, which has been largely maligned by critics but has its oddball charms. Byrne yips like an excited dog as he jumps up into his falsetto on the slo-mo industrial grind "The Facts Of Life", and on the tall tale "Bill" Eric Weissberg's pedal steel sounds like shooting stars over an American desert. (Yes, the same Eric Weissberg who played "Dueling Banjos".) Finally, "Cool Water" rewrites the 1959 Marty Robbins cowboy hit of the same name as a lament for exploited labourers around the world, ending the album on a tense and cinematic note.

THE SECOND SIDE HAS BEEN MALIGNED BY CRITICS, BUT HAS ITS ODDBALL CHARMS

NAKED IS an often hilarious, frequently bleak album about breakdown: of humanity, of technology, of the Earth, and – yes – of a band. Especially after Talking Heads' impressive run in the early 1980s, their eighth album was considered a flop, selling nowhere near their previous numbers and sending no hits very far up the charts. Some of the blame goes to Byrne, who refused to tour and left all the burdens of promotion to his bandmates. Instead, he set about working on his first solo album, using many of the players who appeared on *Naked*. But there was no big exit, no fisticuffs; as he sings on "(Nothing But) Flowers", "*As things fell apart, nobody paid much attention.*" Three years after they released *Naked*, Talking Heads enjoyed a minor hit with "Sax & Violins", a loopy, paranoid tune that was included on the excellent soundtrack to Wim Wender's convoluted *Until The End Of The World*. Only then did the band officially break up, as though Talking Heads could not exist in this new decade. ▲

BOOM BOOM CHI BOOM BOOM

RELEASED: JUNE 15, 1988/APRIL 1989

On album three, the TTC forswear beats and rhymes for Lower East Side rock. Results? In fairness, mixed. But what a launch party!

BY JOHN LEWIS

WITH NO tour to promote *Naked* after its release in April 1988, the individual members of the band were getting used to a post-Talking Heads life. Byrne was hanging out with David Bowie, collaborating with Robert Wilson and Wim Wenders and starting work on his first solo album. Jerry Harrison completed his second solo album with a new band called The Casual Gods. And Chris Frantz and Tina Weymouth, after producing an album for Ziggy Marley entitled *Conscious Party*, decided to revive the Tom Tom Club.

The Tom Tom Club had always been a reactive project – the rhythm section reacting against the apparently domineering sensibilities of their neurotic bandleader. However, while their first two albums subverted Talking Heads' art-rock history by aiming straight for the dancefloor, *Boom Boom Chi Boom Boom* was proposed as a back-to-basics rock album in reaction against the increasingly African-inspired, Parisian sensibilities of *Naked*. "Tina and I felt it was time for a change in direction," says Chris Frantz in his 2020 memoir. "We were in the mood to rock." In a 1998 pop landscape dominated by Milli Vanilli, Stock Aitken Waterman and Whitney Houston, recording a "rock" album probably seemed quite a transgressive move, but it's not something that has stood up particularly well. The result is a rather unfocused LP that never really rocks and only occasionally creates those sublime grooves that Frantz and Weymouth are capable of.

Its centrepiece is a cover of The Velvet Underground's "Femme Fatale", which features Lou Reed on guitar and backing vocals, with the other two Talking Heads, Byrne and Harrison, along for the ride. It's serviceable but slightly pointless, drenched in glossy synth drones, with Weymouth doing a mannered parody of Nico's breathy Teutonic delivery. Slightly more interesting is the album's other cover, a reading of Bob Dylan's "She Belongs To Me", presumably inspired by The VU. Frantz – in a rare outing as lead vocalist – does a passable Lou Reed impression, declaiming Dylan's lyric in a Lou Reed-ish mix of bored and stentorian, all the time bashing out an "All Tomorrow's Parties" drum stomp while Weymouth plays harmonium.

The rest of the album is patchy. It starts well: "Suboceana" is a bouncy, elastic piece of funk rock, with Weymouth whispering aquatic erotica over Mark Roule's choppy Afro-pop guitar riff, reminiscent of something from *Speaking In Tongues*. But by track two, "Shock The World", the failings are starting to show: a potentially compelling piece of surf rock, in praise of the bad-boy boyfriend, is hampered by a bland drum beat. "Don't Say No" is a piece of thin-sounding but oddly mesmeric synth rock. The album's sole instrumental, "Challenge Of The Love Warriors", is the most sonically interesting track: with Wally Badarou exploiting the sampling potential of the Synclavier, Tina Weymouth's breaths and gasps are assembled into a complex drum loop, reminiscent of the sampladelic mid-'80s experiments by the likes of Yello or Art Of Noise (the track would gain a wider audience the next year on the soundtrack to Gus Van Sant's breakthrough hit *Drugstore Cowboy*).

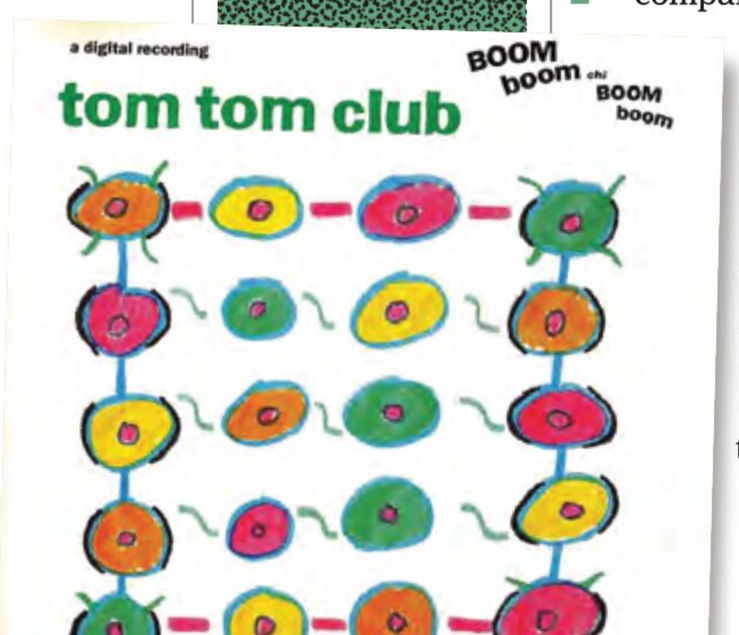
"Born For Love" is a piece of chugging bubblegum rock which sounds like a track that wouldn't quite make the cut on a Blondie album. "Broken Promises" is a very impressive dub groove in search of a decent song. "Little Eva" is a bit of a gem, a piece of spooky gothic indie rock, with modal synth solos drifting over chugging guitars. Weymouth's childlike, chanted vocals tell us about the diabolic girl of the song's title: *"She's the dreams from hell/she paints pictures/scary pictures/she's got things to tell."* "Mighty Teardrop" meanwhile, marks the album's most "rockist" moment: based around a crunching guitar riff that wouldn't sound out of place on the first Talking Heads album.

THE ALBUM was not a success. It didn't chart at all in the UK or the US on its release in 1988 (by comparison, even Jerry Harrison's solo album got to No 78 on the *Billboard* chart). Frustrated by its failure, the band's US label Sire decided to relaunch the LP in April 1989. A radically reworked pressing removed the first two tracks from Side Two and replaced them with three new songs upfront, all

CRITICS' VERDICT

"The first two were patchy affairs... this promises something quite different: with the gradual disintegration of the Heads, the World's Greatest Married Rhythm Section have had more time and energy to do things properly..."
ANDREW SMITH, MELODY MAKER, OCT 22, 1988

"While Frantz and Weymouth's 'other band' seem to be a washing line for Byrne's neuroses, TTC take great pleasure in 'doing' songs for their own sake. The net result is a self-justifying wax crayon pie. Yum."
ANDREW COLLINS, NME, OCT 22, 1988



TRACKMARKS

1. Suboceana ★★★
2. Shock The World ★★
3. Don't Say No ★★
4. Challenge Of The Love Warriors ★★★
5. Femme Fatale ★★
6. Born For Love ★★
7. Broken Promises ★★
8. She Belongs To Me ★★★
9. Little Eva ★★★★
10. Mighty Teardrop ★★★

Label: Fontana (1988), Sire (1989)
Produced by: Chris Frantz and Tina Weymouth, with Arthur Baker
Recorded at: Sigma Sound and Shakedown Sound Studios, New York City
Personnel: Tina Weymouth (bass, keys, guitar), Chris Frantz (drums, key, percussion), Mark Roule (guitar, backing vocals), Gary Pozner (keys, drum programming, percussion, backing vocals), Laura Weymouth (backing vocals), Wally Badarou (Synclavier, keys), Steve Scales (bongos, percussion), Jerry Harrison (keys, backing vocals), David Byrne (guitar, backing vocals), Lou Reed (guitar, backing vocals), Eddie Martinez (guitar), Jay Berliner (Spanish guitar), Glenn Rosenstein (rhythm guitar, keyboards, (backing vocals), Heidi Berg (violin), Coco Arnesen Roule (vocals), Bashiri Johnson (percussion), Tiny Valentine (backing vocals), Phil Gaines (background vocals), Arthur Baker (backing vocals), Abdu Mahali (backing vocals)
Highest chart position: UK –; US 114

co-produced with Arthur Baker. It opens with "Call Of The Wild", a rather good piece of tropical pop – not dissimilar from the Caribbean-inflected moments on *Naked*, with guitarist Mark Roule doing a Johnny Marr impression. A video using footage from nature documentaries got some airplay on MTV, and it makes a much better lead single than anything on the original album. Track two is "Kiss Me When I Get Back", a fierce piece of Afro-funk with a singalong chorus. Both link nicely into the slinky "Wa Wa Dance", which appears to be Chris and Tina's love song to their young children (*"Baby likes to be/Baby don't hurry/Baby likes to sleep/Baby don't worry"*). "Mighty Teardrop", meanwhile, is renamed and reworked as a punchier synth-rock track called "I Confess". The 1989 US release is by far the better package (and it eventually reached 114 in the *Billboard* chart in May 1989). Weirdly, the best track that the band recorded at this time, another piece of tropical funk entitled "Devil Does Your Dog Bite", was featured on the soundtrack to *Married To The Mob* but didn't appear on either version of the album, only appearing as the B-side to "Don't Say No".

THE 1989 US RELEASE OF BOOM BOOM... IS BY FAR THE BETTER PACKAGE

Instead of playing the big theatres and arenas that they could probably have filled – especially in the absence of any Talking Heads dates – the band accompanied the initial 1988 launch of the album by playing small club dates. In September came a lengthy residency at the 350-capacity CBGB's in New York (with special guests each night including Debbie Harry, Dee Dee Ramone and Lou Reed), followed in October by six nights at the similarly sized Borderline in London. On the album's 1989 relaunch they'd moved up to the 1,000-capacity New Ritz (the legendary Manhattan punk club which had relocated around the corner to the old home of Studio 54). These gigs were hugely entertaining affairs but – in all honesty – nothing on either edition of this album was quite as good. ▲

DAVID BYRNE IN THE 1990s

RELEASED: 1991–1999

His political agenda softened with occasional pop flourishes, Byrne bids goodbye to the playfulness of Talking Heads (and to Talking Heads). By the decade's end, he makes peace with theatrical pop. BY NICK HASTED

DAVID BYRNE and Brian Eno were once walking through New York City, discussing whatever Byrne and Eno discuss in their downtime, when they were set upon by 14 muggers. "It was quite frightening," Eno recalled. His companion's reaction was equally startling. "My enduring memory," he explained, "is of David being dragged off into the bushes, saying, 'Uh-oh!'"

Uh-Oh was also the title of Byrne's most combative album of the '90s, a decade in which, despite enthusiastically re-embracing pop music, he fell deep into the commercial wilderness, bewilderingly abandoned by much of Talking Heads' audience. The Byrne defined by "Psycho Killer", the blandly alienated character who could have been created as a doppelganger by Andy Warhol on some quiet night at CBGB's, or else cast in a David Lynch film, and who he now variously recognised as "mildly autistic", was similarly left behind. He was replaced by an articulate political animal, using his new music to grapple with religion, right-wing terrorism and American iniquity in a way that now seems eerily prescient. Uh-oh, indeed.

The decade anyway began with some long-feared bad news. "You could say we've broken up, or call it whatever you like," Byrne dismissively said of Talking Heads in a 1991 *Los Angeles Times* interview, despite the five-album deal they'd signed with Sire after *Naked*. The other Heads were enduringly apoplectic about this impersonal termination. Byrne, though, was unrepentant.

Byrne saw the split as a "great relief", but it instantly reduced his '90s status. "Upon parting with Talking Heads, my bread and butter, I also perversely set out to sabotage my own career," he further confessed to journalist Carol Cooper, "releasing first a Latin record, and then an orchestral score." *Rei Momo* was a graceful and romantic immersion in Latin rhythms, but for many Heads fans it had simply deepened *Naked*'s Afro-Parisian longueurs, and now **The Forest** LUAKA BOP/WARNERS, 1991 ★★ was the classical score that welcomed Byrne's new decade. It was a sort of sequel to *Music For "The Knee Plays"*, having been written for another Robert Wilson theatrical piece in 1987. Byrne went in hard conceptually, bringing the Sumerian *Epic Of Gilgamesh* two millennia forward in time, to the apex of the Industrial Revolution in the 1840s. "That era seemed like the roots of modern western culture," he enthused to Simon Reynolds, "when all our attitudes to technology, nature and the city were born." Rather than mourn a societal fall from rustic innocence, he "wanted to understand the glory of it, the romance of the factory".

The Forest also consciously parked Byrne's Latin and African-American leanings, to explore his music's western, European roots. "Ur"'s waltz-like sway and courtly strings were followed by the heavy, shipboard roll of "Europa Duras", and the Appalachian, fiddle-and-accordion Americana of "Tula". While nodding to 19th-century Romantics from Wagner to Mahler, Byrne also referenced Alex North's "sweeping, grandiose music with slight Middle Eastern touches" for the Elizabeth Taylor epic *Cleopatra* (1963), adding a modern Mesopotamian mood to his global patchwork. *The Forest* took as much from Hollywood (where it was partly recorded) as avant-garde theatre, happy to march and blast.

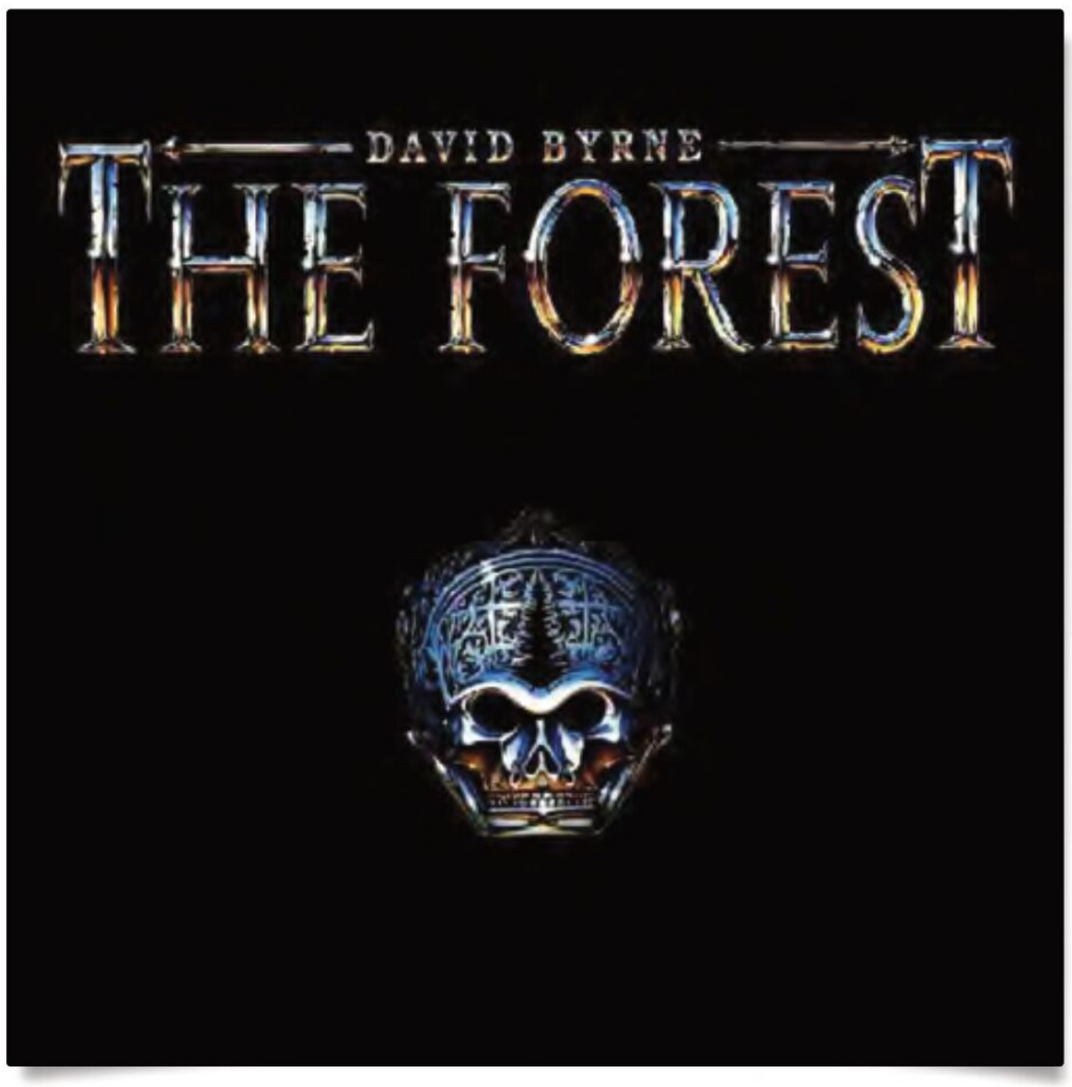
Byrne was living in LA with his wife and child now, still pursuing possible follow-ups to *True Stories*, owner of an Oscar for *The Last Emperor* soundtrack, and commuting to New York to maintain Luaka Bop's expansive schedule. None of this diluted his commitment to **Uh-Oh** LUAKA BOP/WARNERS, 1992 ★★★, an album he saw as drawing a line under Talking Heads with his fullest solo ▶

CRITICS' VERDICT

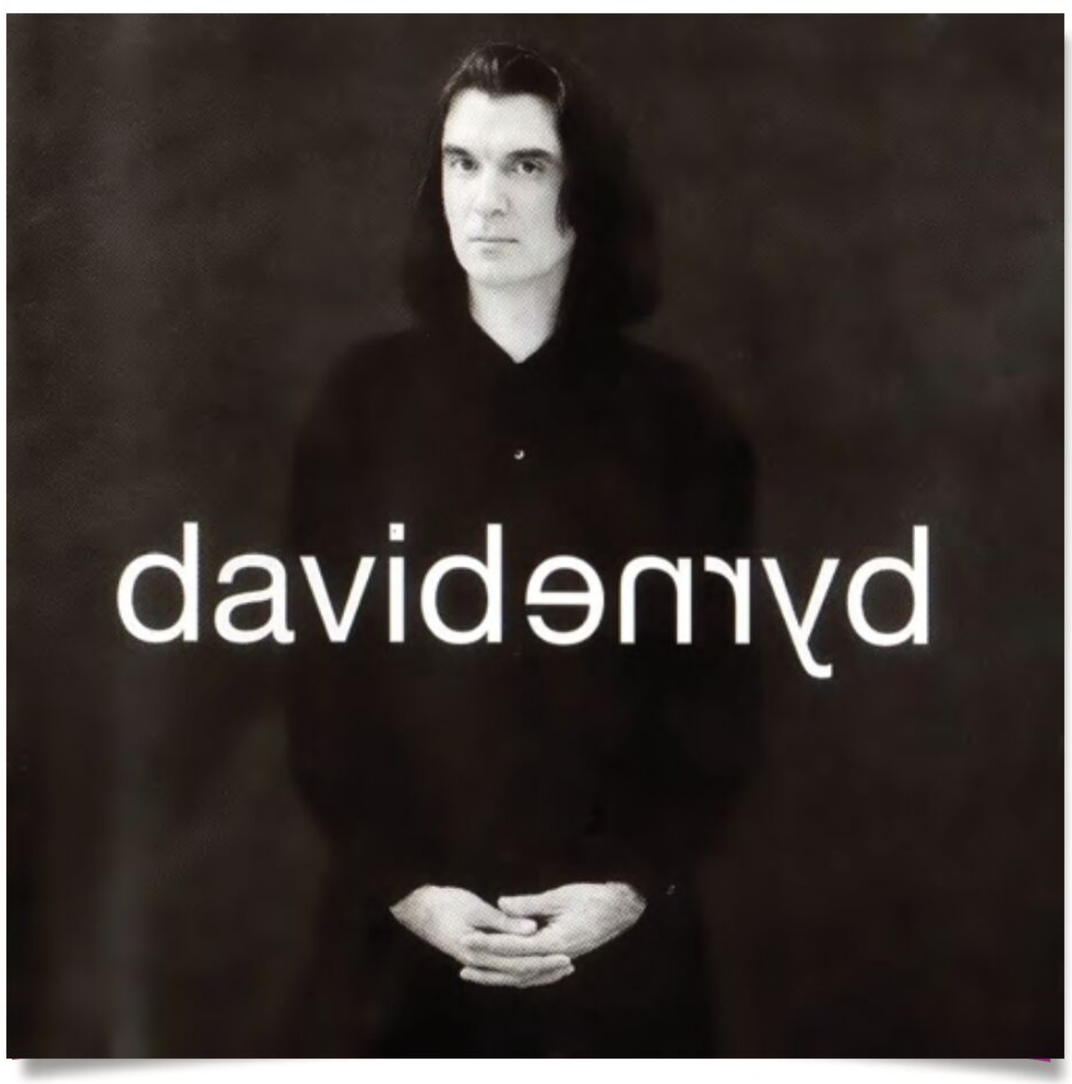
THE FOREST

"Its lofty aim involves musically evoking the current period in history and transcending the waking mind. Yes, we're talking sensitive art, and while the highlights are strangely stirring, emotive and spirited... as a piece of entertainment it fares less well."
BETTY PAGE, NME, JULY 27, 1991

"*The Forest* began life as background music and has stubbornly remained so. If close to an hour of pseudo-classical bilge with all the trimmings is your idea of fun, you'll be on your flaming rocking horse."
JON WILDE, MELODY MAKER, JUNE 29, 1991

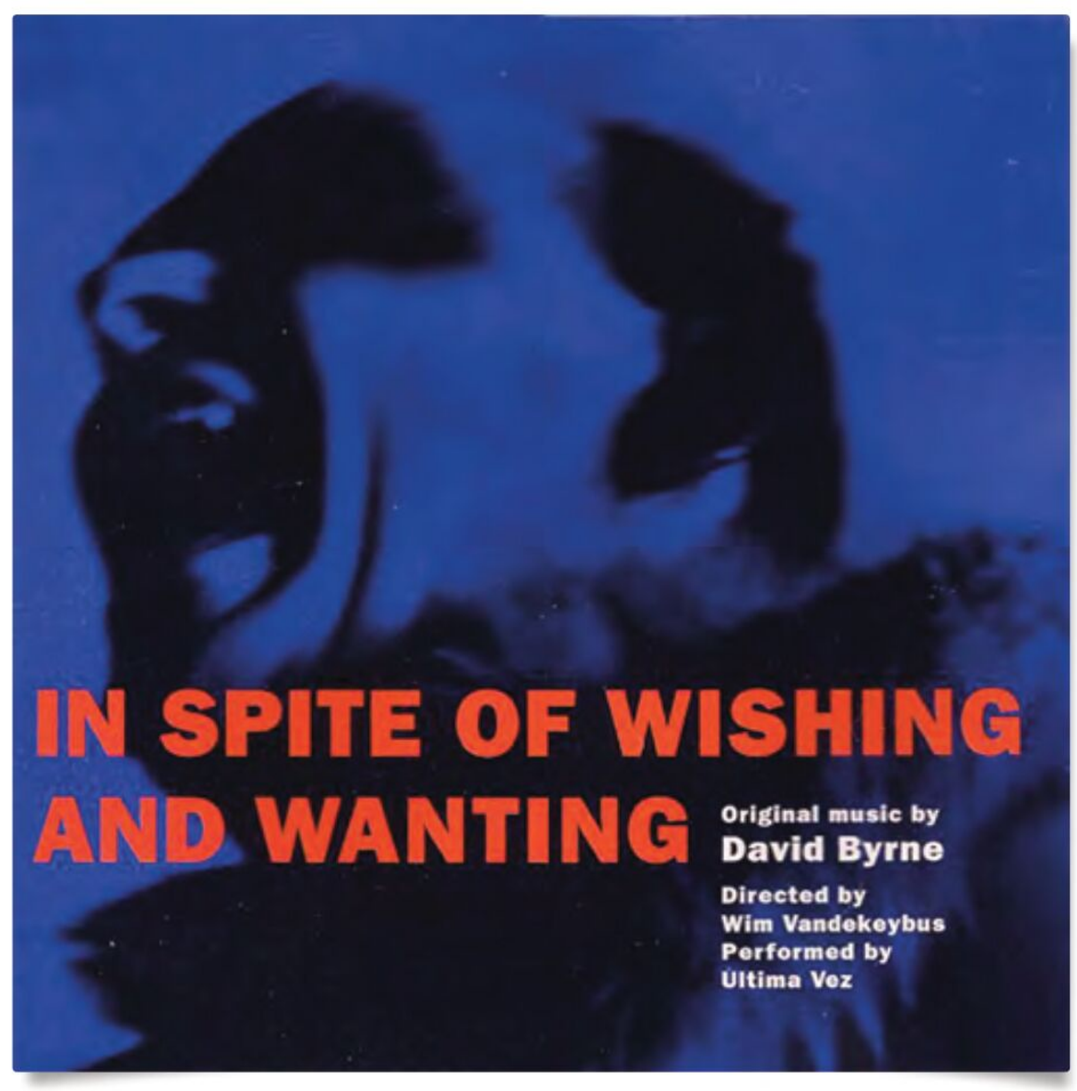

DAVID BYRNE
THE FOREST

David Byrne
uh-oh


davidenryd

Feelings
DAVID BYRNE

THE VISIBLE MAN
Contains the attenuated strain Salmonella typhi Ty 21a


IN SPITE OF WISHING AND WANTING
Original music by
David Byrne
Directed by
Wim Vandekeybus
Performed by
Ultima Vez

musical expression yet. The single was "Girls On My Mind", "a real silly little song" that bounced along disarmingly to the cuckoo-like sound of a recorder, while the previously asexual Byrne assumed the role of an insatiably fantasising ladies man. "*You may ask yourself/Who is that guy?*" he sang, casually referencing "Once In A Lifetime", where before he'd kept his old band at arm's length. "The company thinks it'll be a hit," he offered, eager to please.

Uh-Oh's title was, he explained, "a warning", for what was also his angriest record. The neutral acceptance of Middle American quirks that had characterised *True Stories* was gone. Where *My Life In The Bush of Ghosts*, too, had taken inspiration from Evangelical preachers, and the ecstasies of voodoo and other to him exotic religions still fascinated, he now took aim squarely at Christianity, with a raw viciousness that was new. If he was a David Lynch character now, he was more Dennis Hopper than Kyle Maclachlan. His affectless Warhol persona was also stripped away, leaving his real feelings. "What I noticed when writing this record," he told journalist Phil Sutcliffe, "was a lot of the stuff was very direct... That's me ranting, I'm not in character."

Uh-Oh maintained the sense of bliss he'd found in Brazilian music, the "taste of paradise" that had tempted him from rock'n'roll's more "industrial" rhythms. It was there in the voice of wide-eyed wonder that animated not only "Girls On My Mind" but "Now I'm Your Mom", a similarly daffy trans anthem that managed to squeeze gender civil rights between the jokes, declaring that, like Columbus, "*we are pioneers... Ain't gonna be no chains on me*." But elsewhere he was invigoratingly sardonic. "Twistin' In The Wind" visited "*Washington, DC, a funny little town*", and swiftly condemned it to Sodom-like doom: "*You ought to be ashamed, you ought to be destroyed/I'll chop you up in little bits, and feed you to my dogs*." Looped licks of Stax guitar couldn't cure the verses' vistas of bloody, dazed Americans, in a nation where "*the train has jumped the tracks*", with no-one at the wheel. Byrne's voice nastily danced and taunted in the ruins.

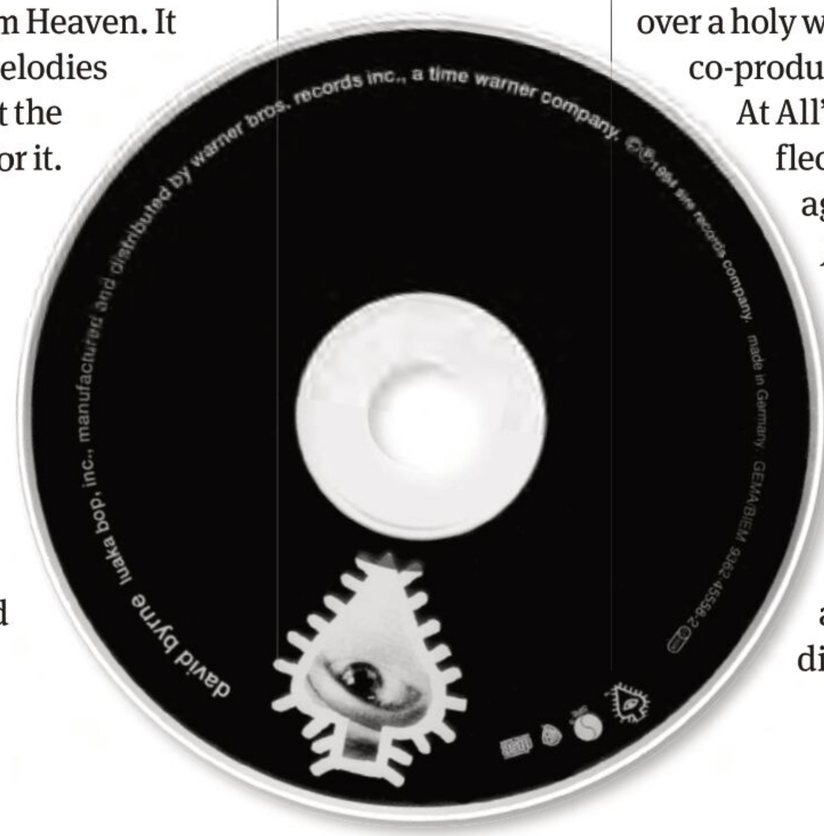
"A Walk In The Dark" was a still purer horror story, Byrne now creeping in miasmic shadows, relishing his saturnine threat as he leered, "*Burn, baby, burn/Jesus, Mary and the Holy Ghost... They shit their pants, they got so scared*." "Something Ain't Right"'s gospel backing singers couldn't hold him back, either, from daring God in hoarse-voiced fury: "*Come on down, you old fart/Let's see if you have got a heart/...Or are you the Devil in disguise?*" "Monkey Man" saw evolution lurch into reverse, DNA and civilisation tumbling to dust.

Uh-Oh's sleeve, with a Snoopy-like Beagle celestially enthroned and worshipped by angels, kept up the attack of a man who, in lyrics steeped in biblical language, seemed suddenly moved to tear the conventional, conservative American God down from Heaven. It was bracing stuff, and melodies still soared and sang, but the pop public had no taste for it.

David Byrne **LUAKA BOP, 1994** ★★★ doubled down on these themes. Aged 42, the long-haired Byrne on its dourly black-and-white cover looked every inch the middle-aged, well-heeled bohemian, and a reflective patina overlaid yet more apocalyptic panoramas. "A Long Time Ago" opened with fog seeming to hang over its gentle-voiced recollection of lost New York delights. "*It's not the end of the world*," the narrator paused to remind himself. "*It's the closing of a discotheque*." Technology and biology also warred through the album, in the "*black market designer genes*" of "A Self-Made Man", and the itchily, explicitly Heads-like funk of "Angels", where "*some salty lubrication*" oils "*the sensuous world*".

Metallic, near-No Wave guitars squalled over a holy war in "Crash", thanks to co-producer Arto Lindsay. "Nothing At All", too, whipped along on flecks of feedback, as Byrne again put the boot into "*Baby Jesus, holy Moses*", and again encompassed great swathes of his country in his own God-like purview: "*From the Rockies to the Rio Grande/A shadow falls across the land*." "Lillies Of The Valley" saw an anti-abortion doctor let a mother die, confirming Byrne's

In the pink: Byrne in Edinburgh in 1998, in the costume that would precede a striptease down to the "flayed" bodysuit (opposite) during the *Feelings* tour



DAN TUFFS/GETTY IMAGES

transformation into a protest singer à la Lou Reed of *New York*, while "Strange Ritual" was spooked Americana in latter-day Pere Ubu style. The simple ballad "My Love Is You", part Beatles, part bossa nova, and the joyous, ska lilt of "Buck Naked" offered needed relief. But like its sleeve, *David Byrne* seemed a black-and-white album, poised, accomplished and austere, finding no path back into the hearts of the America it documented.

"After a while I managed to reintegrate a lot of more pop song material and attitude," Byrne reflected to interviewer Carol Cooper on where his Latin and African experiments had left him. "But those other things became integrated into the pop songs too. I do miss," he pined, "having more available funds and creative platforms."

Feelings LUAKA BOP, 1997 ★★★★ was his most concerted attempt to claw back the ground he'd lost. If it had been released after *Naked*, or better yet *Little Creatures*, Talking Heads' unlikely stardom might still have been his. Morcheeba mostly produced, adding a convincing late-'90s groove and trip-hop ambience. David Byrne's po-faced, midlife years fell away, for a singer suddenly wholly re-engaged with pop. "Miss America" was the glorious single, its political attack now cloaked in Latin post-war big bands, Sondheim and Bernstein's "America" refashioned for loyally patriotic Latinos, and pop iconography deployed to telling effect: "*Oh, Supergirl, you'll be my supermodel, although your pants are round your ankles/...I'll be your Dirty Harry.*" Meanwhile, the melody, greased by Morcheeba's sequenced beats and Joe Galdo's samba percussion, simply flew.

POLITICS AND religion remained sometimes bloodily entwined. Looking through Byrne's '90s work, his long experience of America meant he wasn't distracted by its switch from George Bush to Bill Clinton. Instead, he fixed on undercurrents which today flow all too fast. Shudderingly hard, sequenced beats underpinned the remorseless vocal threat of "Dance On Vaseline", which waited 'til its last verse to visit Oklahoma City, where right-wing terrorist Timothy McVeigh blew up 128 of his fellow Americans in 1995. "*I was a silly putty, your big ideas are useless to me now,*" Byrne muttered, as "*lousy science-fiction*" seeped from TV screens, and something like a plane engine roared. Thoughts of 9/11 now flicker through this prescient song. Then in the very next track, a far brighter, catchier tune called "The Gates Of Paradise", he looked again at the nexus of blind faith and total violence. "*The terrorists are acting out of sweet, sweet love,*" he crooned, blissed out, "*to bring us home again.*"

If terrorists were acting out love, and Americans were killing Americans from love of America, what could it all mean, I asked Byrne that year. "It means that they feel helpless," he replied. "That they feel a lack of connection, and a lack of access to channels, to ways to express themselves. Freedom is a deception, if you don't have access to those things...the lunatics might just be ultra-sensitive. They're the ones who've snapped first." Serial killers and the Unabomber were, he added, "the other side of the coin" of "the mad, exuberant creativity" which he'd first fallen for in the Beats and Elvis.

Feelings wasn't all bombs and bodies, anyway. Its music found Byrne, too, acting out of love, sweet love, from the shuffling Hawaiian guitar and sympathy of "You Don't Know Me" to the cut-glass, elegant Noel Coward savageries of "They Are in Love". "A Soft Seduction" was sung with an aching falsetto, lending comfort to its cast of homeless lost souls, and "Amnesia" entered The Band's sacred dreamtime, in a lullaby quoting from Richard Manuel's "When You Awake". Though Byrne observed rock verities crumbling in the lyrics of "Burnt By The Sun", from string quartets to sequencers, there was plenty more pop to play with here.

Feelings was remixed on the same year's **The Visible Man** LUAKA BOP 1997, ★★, and further deconstructed in 1999's **In Spite Of Wishing And Wanting** LUAKA BOP, ★★, which combined more remixes with a dance piece's ambient soundtrack. The *Feelings* tour was more suggestive of Byrne's future, with him first dressed in pink fur, then changing costumes in a slow striptease down to a shockingly flayed, skinless bodysuit. Theatricality and renewed pop conviction would guide his path back to relevance. ▲

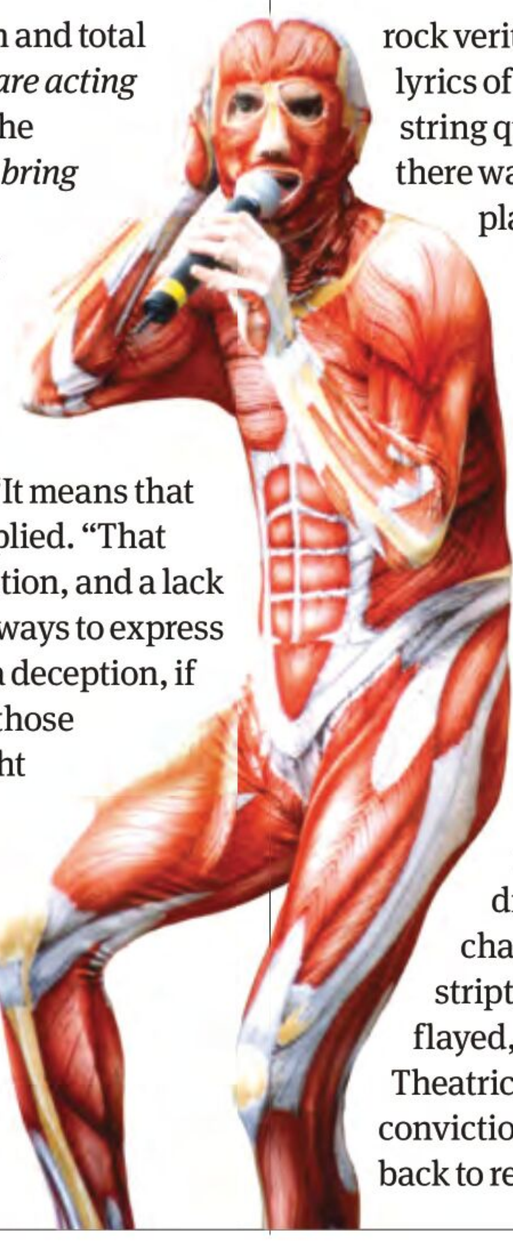
CRITICS' VERDICT

UH-OH

"*Uh-Oh* is thus charming and sparking – the clipped guitars, the cheek-puffing brass, the gospelly choruses – but in the end insubstantial. You can count the lasting tunes on the clapper of your castanet. And that leaves Byrne – as what? The alternative Gloria Estefan? Paul Simon with a Havana cigar? The Mambo King in exile? A tense and nervous Latin lover? All those things, and not much more."
ROGER MORTON, NME, MARCH 7, 1992

"*Uh-Oh* argues that it is early to let off the firecrackers, but there's enough imaginative flutter here to encourage the hope that Byrne's next chapter will pick up the threads that Talking Heads, now officially extinct, have left tantalisingly unravelled."
JON WILDE, MELODY MAKER, MARCH 7, 1992

UH-OH'S TITLE WAS, BYRNE EXPLAINED, "A WARNING"... HE NOW TOOK AIM AT CHRISTIANITY WITH A RAW VICIOUSNESS



SLEEVENOTES

THE FOREST

Released: June 1991
Label: Luaka Bop/Sire
Orchestrated and conducted by: Jimmie Haskell
Engineered by: Andy Waterman, Mark Wolfson, Edu Meyer
Recorded at: Entourage Studios, The Bakery Recording Studios, LA; Hansa Tonstudio, Berlin
Highest chart position: UK – ; US –

UH-OH

Released: March 3, 1991
Label: Luaka Bop/Warner Bros
Nick Launay
Recorded at: Power Station, Sigma Sound, The Hit Factory, Platinum Island, Electric Lady Studios, NYC
Highest chart position: UK 26; US 125

DAVID BYRNE

Released: May 24, 1994
Label: Luaka Bop/Warner Bros
Produced by: Arto Lindsay, David Byrne, Susan Rogers
Recorded at: Clinton Studio, NYC
Highest chart position: UK 44; US 139

FEELINGS

Released: June 17, 1997
Label: Luaka Bop/Warner Bros
Produced by: David Byrne, Joe Galdo, Morcheeba production (Paul Godfrey, Ross Godfrey, Pete Norris)
Recorded at: David Byrne's home studio, NYC; ICP, Brussels
Highest chart position: UK 91; US 155

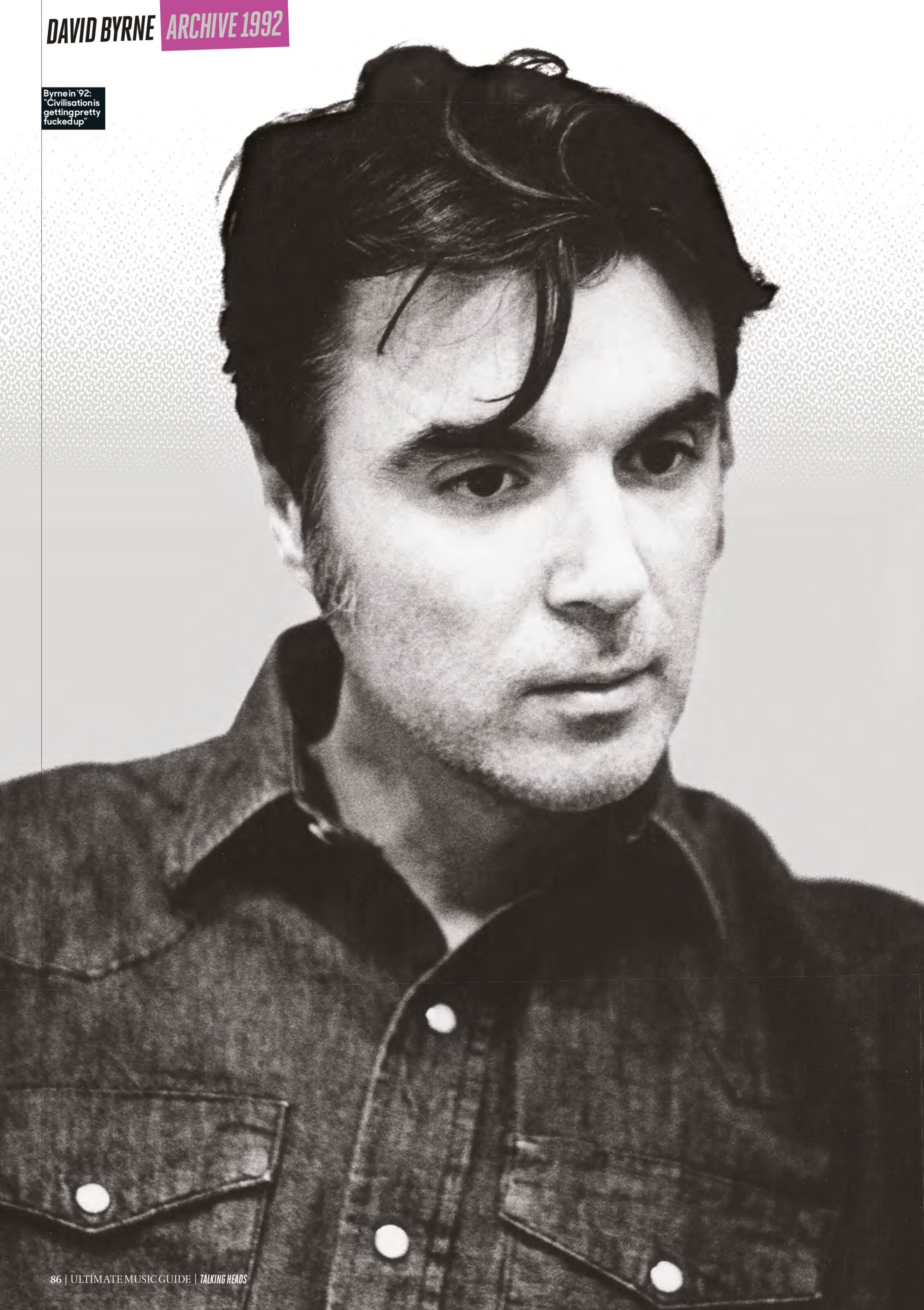
THE VISIBLE MAN

Released: 1998
Label: Luaka Bop
Remixes by: DJ Food, Mark Walk & Ruby, New Kingdom, Thievery Corporation, B-boy 3000, Lloop, Cecco Music, Mark Saunders & David Byrne, Rea Mochiach
Recorded at: various
Highest chart position: UK – ; US –

IN SPITE OF WISHING AND WANTING

Released: 1999
Label: Luaka Bop
Produced by: David Byrne
Recorded at: David Byrne's home studio, New York City; ICP, Brussels
Highest chart position: UK –; US –

GIEKNAEPS/GETTY IMAGES



Byrne in '92: "Civilisation is getting pretty fucked up"

"It was a long time to continue a charade"

Talking Heads are officially no more, but with his angry third solo album *Uh-Oh* their former singer still has things to say: about state crimes, youth violence, pre-Christian religions and evolution in reverse. "This hasn't been too ugly," he tells MAX BELL of the split, "but it was a painful decision for everyone; hurt feelings all round."

VOX MARCH 1992

THERE IS a line on the bumf accompanying David Byrne's latest album *Uh-Oh* that refers to him as "All-around Renaissance man, head Talking Head and Brazil nut". Spot the deliberate mistakes...

Byrne groans when the snazzy shorthand is read back to him. "That renaissance man thing is just embarrassing. It's meant to be flattering but nobody lives up to it. You can only disappoint."

As for the second part of the statement, Talking Heads are, alas, de-funked, and don't go holding your breath for any reunion. The band last played here in 1983, on the Big Suit tour which Byrne later said he hated. Their American swansong coincided with the release of 1988's *Naked*. After that, the Byrne thinks they just stopped making sense.

"We announced the split last year but it was like: 'What's new?' Really we'd parted company quite a while ago. It was a long time to continue a charade. I know the others [*Chris Frantz, Tina Weymouth and Jerry Harrison*] didn't quite see it that way, but it was a painful decision for everyone; hurt feelings all round. I think it was handled pretty well as these things go: they can be tawdry, messy affairs. This hasn't been too ugly. Obviously there'll now be box-sets and so on – that's the way of record companies. I'll collaborate to the extent that I want the pricing and packaging up to scratch. There are some odds and ends that are OK if placed in the right context."

Despite his laconic demeanour Byrne saw the writing on the wall when he started opting out of the Heads to make *True Stories*. In any case his solo career has been fruitful – *The Catherine Wheel, Rei Momo, The Forest* for a start – and his latest collision of Third and First world cultures is another Class A act: from the supercharged power-chord brass arrangements of samba, mambo and cha-cha ▶

PENNIE SMITH

Heads on the sofa, 1988: (l-r) Frantz, Harrison, Weymouth, Byrne

rhythms, right down to its title, itself a sufficiently familiar Byrne phrase.

"Yeah, I don't know why I didn't use that before," says Byrne, perhaps forgetting the very first track on the Heads' debut album *77* which was called "Uh-Oh, Love Comes To Town". "It's a bit of a warning, because a lot of the songs have some anger to them."

Uh-Oh is every bit as weird and wonderful an artefact as we've come to expect from Byrne. There are songs about fathers having sex changes, cowboy shithouses, mental violence, kids killing time and each other in malls, legitimised state crime and men turning back into monkeys. God gets called *"an old fart"* and there is a devilishly dark sub-conscious narrator who reads too many World War III and Snake Eyes comics and takes toys away from small children. "Civilisation is getting pretty fucked up," according to David. But if everything was hunky dory what would he write about?

As usual with Byrne, you sometimes wonder what's come over the man but are glad it did anyway. Happily married to Adelle Lutz, he's fathered his own little creature (Malu Abeni Valentine) and given birth to the Luaka Bop record company, an outlet for rumbustious Latin American dance music. Hell, he even got an Oscar for the music to Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor*. Put that in your pipe and smoke it David Bowie, Mark Knopfler, Peter Gabriel, etcetera.

"I guess I'm pretty lucky, but I have my dark moments and for a songwriter those can hold an incredible attraction. I like to write stuff that is humorous but also quite shocking. A lot of nature is up for grabs these days, especially if you don't accept Christian ideas of God creating the world, and man as a separate entity.

"I'm more in sympathy with pre-Christian religions, ones that still exist in Afro-Caribbean or Latin cultures; I like ideas that maintain ties with natural forces and the elements, that seek a balance. It sounds like an Oriental philosophy – but I hope my music is funkier," he chuckles. Indeed it is. Sorry Sting old pal, but David Byrne has you and the opposition beaten.

> **"I have my dark moments... for a songwriter those can hold an incredible attraction"**
> **DAVID BYRNE**

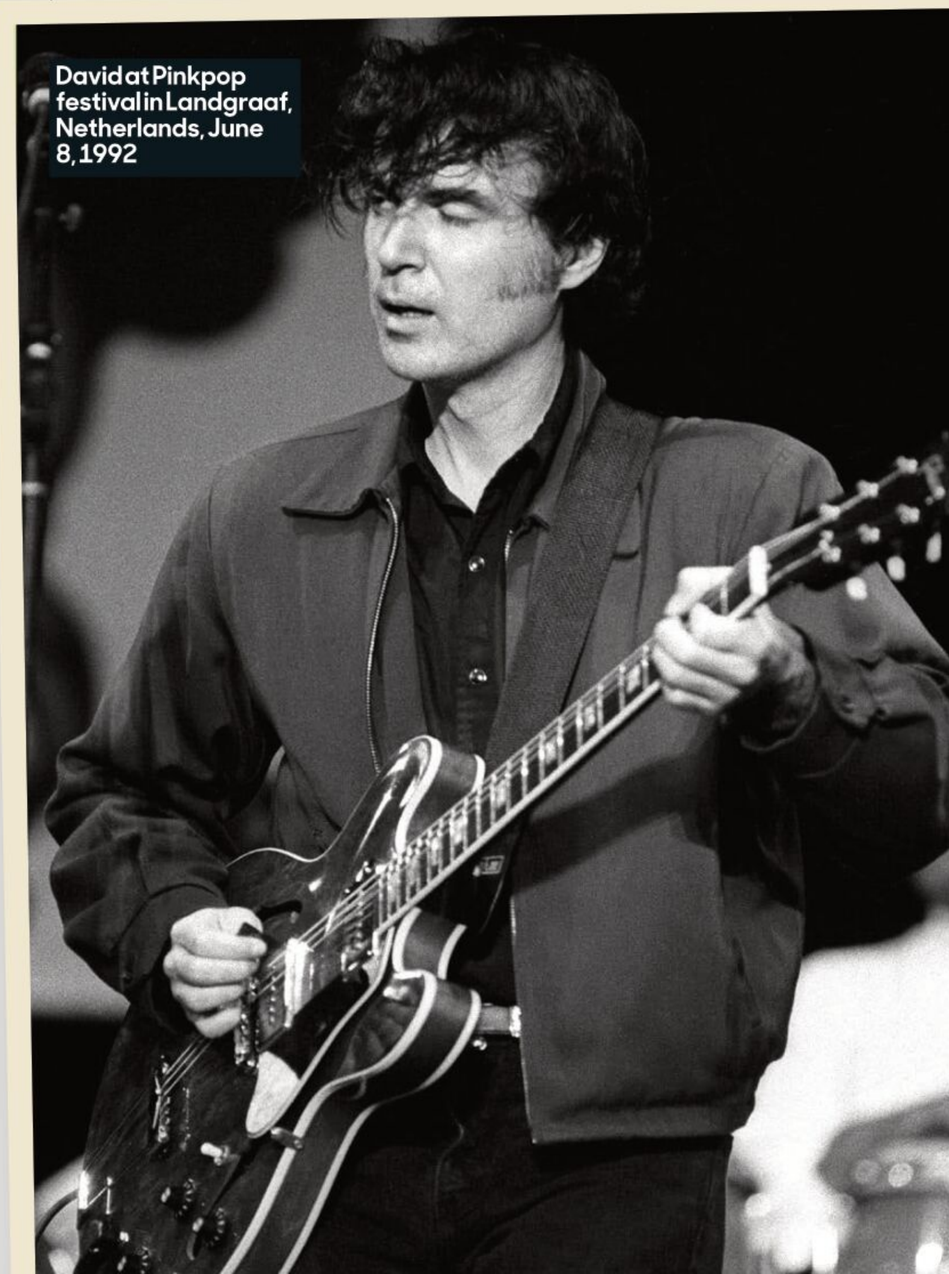
"I've spent some time in India recently working on a compilation of the soundtrack film music of Vijaya Anand, and then I got home and did some solo dates, just me and a guitar, getting back in the mood. I like hearing songs in their basic form."

CURRENTLY RESIDENT in LA, Byrne is casting an eye over new film ideas, thinking about making some videos and preparing the ground for a solo world tour to hit Britain in the fall.

Never one to let the rainforest grow under his feet, Byrne has also committed time and finance to Luaka Bop's New York-based endeavours and will break the "ethnic" World Music mould by putting out an AR Kane set in the States this month. When he isn't getting lost in the ecstatic world of rhythm and "slowly overcoming the racism that was instilled in me by society" David listens to Teenage Fanclub ("heard it before but you can sing along all right"), U2 ("I preferred 'em when they weren't singing about love") or Jimmie Dale Gilmore's Flatlanders, and marvels at the presence of Nirvana next to Jacko in the American charts.

Byrne says he has no idea how *Uh-Oh* fits into the scheme of things. "It's not as Latin sounding as *Rei Momo* so it stands a chance. The single is gonna be 'Girls On My Mind' which is a real silly little song about a sexual braggart. It's not at all typical of the album but the company thinks it'll be a hit. Maybe it'll be another 'Psycho Killer'. Another song to live down all my life!"

David Byrne is fortysomething and trying to learn Español. He'll be speaking it like a native any day now. Uh-Oh! ▲



David at Pinkpop festival in Landgraaf, Netherlands, June 8, 1992

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DARK SNEAK LOVE ACTION

RELEASED: JANUARY 1992

Magpie party music with sexy moments, and only the occasional mis-step. A band arriving at the peak of their powers, only to find no-one listening. BY PIERS MARTIN

DARK SNEAK LOVE ACTION is the Tom Tom Club album that's unfairly overlooked. It was released at the start of 1992 and likely overshadowed by the casual announcement a month earlier in the *Los Angeles Times* that David Byrne had left Talking Heads and had forgotten to tell the rest of the band. This soured most of the promotion Tina Weymouth and Chris Frantz took on for the record and, nine months later, in the same paper, Frantz said: "As far as we're concerned the band never really broke up. David just decided to leave. Communicating with other people has never been David's forte, at least not on a personal level."

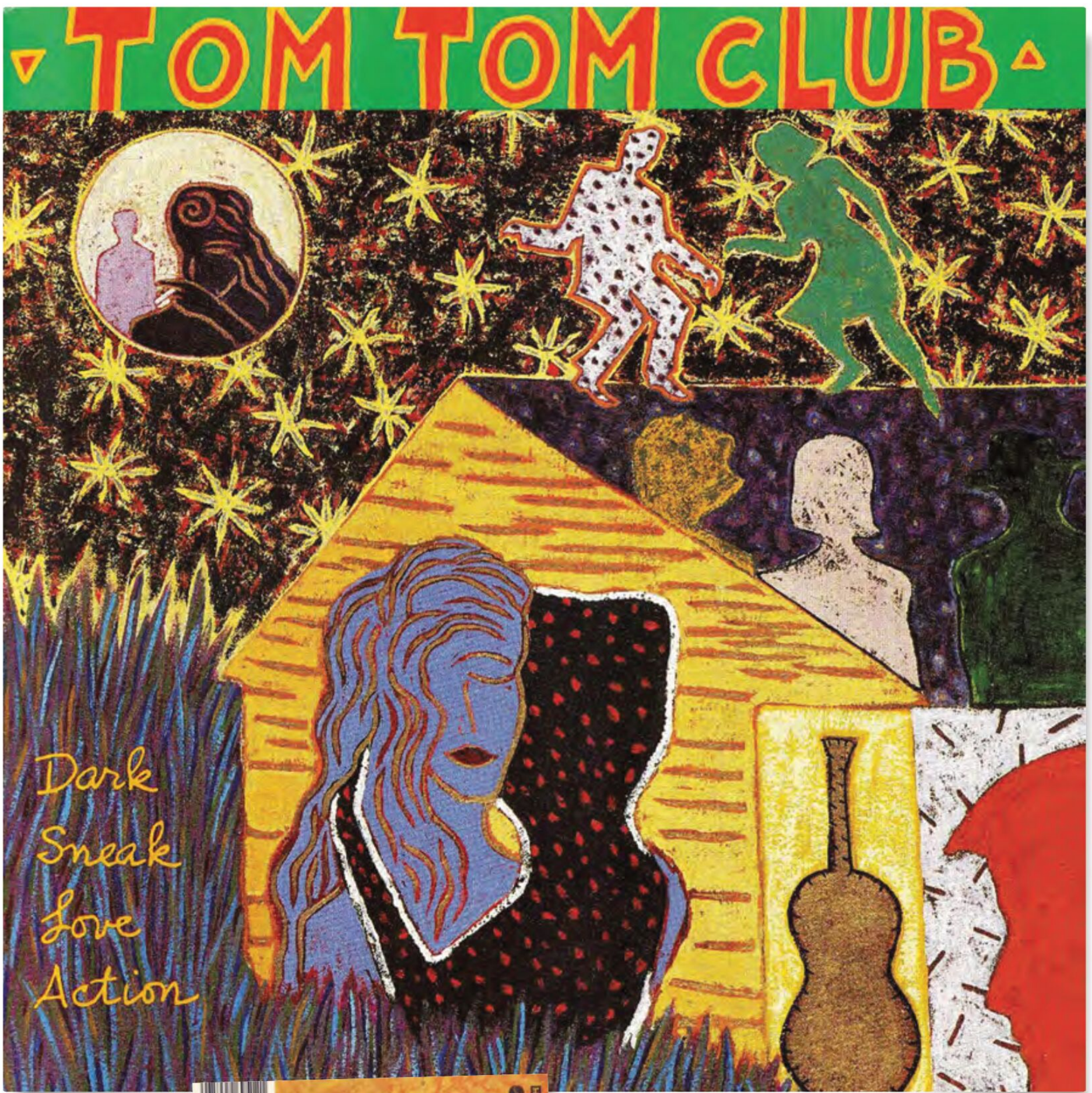
Though they couldn't know at the time, the album is also Tom Tom Club's last great hurrah. Recorded at the couple's new music and painting studio at their home in Fairfield, Connecticut, with a stripped-back lineup of Frantz, Weymouth, guitarist Mark Roule and Bruce Martin on keys and programming, *Dark Sneak Love Action* is a noble attempt to salvage some credibility after the commercial disaster of *Boom Boom Chi Boom Boom*. In that regard, these dozen songs are among the strongest Tom Tom Club ever put together.

From the beatific openers "Love Wave" and "Sunshine And Ecstasy" through to the trippy finale "As The Disco Ball Turns" and "Daddy Come Home", this is delirious, druggy pop, strange and seductive, drawing on influences from Compass Point dub, New York art-funk and the soulful groove of Chicago house to improve a potent songwriting formula that would not be bettered. By the time of 2000's comeback *The Good, The Bad And The Funky*, Tom Tom Club would be perceived as a novelty heritage act. In contrast, *Dark Sneak Love Action* finds them at the peak of their powers with nothing to lose, a decade of Talking Heads and Tom Tom Club experience distilled into one record. Trouble is, no one cared, and the album fared even worse than its predecessor.

Mistakes were made, it's true. Leading with a passable cover of Hot Chocolate's "You Sexy Thing" might have seemed like a good idea at the time but it feels like one final, desperate roll of the dice by Sire to see if the act could gain traction. The original plan to tackle the song must have come from Weymouth and Frantz, though. Loved up and seemingly indulging their carnal and chemical whims, "You Sexy Thing" certainly fits the mood of illicit, consensual engagement and late-night party pleasures conjured by the band's hedonistic disco and Weymouth's wry, euphemistic lyrics. During the tropical skank of "Irresistible Party Bag", she provides an image that's hard to shake: *"He raised his purple-headed, crested majesty/So sweet of you to come/Ten flambeaux alight his pageantry/This anticipation's half the fun."*

To be fair, Frantz and Weymouth were occasionally prone to misjudgement, not least assuming they could extract a decent album from the crack-addled Happy Mondays when the couple tried to produce their *Yes Please!* album at Eddy Grant's studio in Barbados in 1992, shortly after *Dark Sneak Love Action* was released.

For Frantz and Weymouth, the three years between *Boom Boom Chi Boom Boom* and its follow-up must have been tinged with uncertainty. Talking Heads' final album *Naked* also came out in 1988, and with little communication from Byrne about the direction of that band, the rhythm section would have felt cast adrift, let down by their old friend, and also suspicious of the rumours concerning its future circulating in the press. And with Tom Tom Club hardly the toast of the town, their options were limited. Weymouth alludes to this in "Love Wave", drawling: *"I played guitar with a media star/The entire event took place in a bar/Where'd the kid go? Is he in a funk?/(It's not your fault they filled your head with junk)."* Byrne, perhaps, is the star, his head inflated with praise and opinions. "It's



TRACKMARKS

1. Love Wave ★★★
2. Sunshine And Ecstasy ★★★★★
3. You Sexy Thing ★★★
4. Who Wants An Ugly Girl? ★★★
5. Say I Am ★★★
6. Irresistible Party Dip ★★★★
7. Dark Sneak Love Action ★★★★
8. Innocent Sex Kiss ★★★
9. Dogs In The Trash ★★
10. My Mama Told Me ★★
11. As The Disco Ball Turns ★★★★
12. Daddy Come Home ★★★★★

Label: Sire/Reprise
Produced by:v Bruce Martin, Chris Franz Tina Weymouth, Mark Roule
Recorded at: Tom Tom Clubhouse, Fairfield, Connecticut, US
Personnel includes: Tina Weymouth (bass, vocals), Chris Frantz (drums, percussion, vocals), Mark Roule (guitar, vocals), Bruce Martin (programming, keys, accordion, vocals), Lani Weymouth (vocals), Victoria Clamp (vocals)
Highest chart position: US –; UK –

not meant to be cruel or mean in any way," Weymouth told the *LA Times*, admitting the kid refers to Byrne. "It's a reflection more of the world and how the media changes people sometimes if they actually believe it."

THESE DOZEN SONGS ARE AMONG THE STRONGEST TTC EVER PUT TOGETHER

IF TOM TOM CLUB were suffering, they chose to dance the pain away, or numb it with stimulants. Their default setting is to always look on the bright side, and this album underlines their party-starting prowess. The record's central core of "Say I Am", "Irresistible Party Dip" and "Dark Sneak Love Action", which feature Kirtsy MacColl on vocals, is junkshop boogie par excellence, furnished with gonzo rhythms cemented in dub, celestial vocals and dippy melody, the kind of tracks DJs play to get the crowd in the mood.

The baggy rave of "Sunshine And Ecstasy" is as euphoric as its title, a lost classic from 1992 in the style of New Order's *Technique* that deserves a Balearic following today, particularly its "Sunshine And Sensi" mix by Tuta Aquino. On the airy pop of "As The Disco Ball Turns", a jaded Weymouth skewers the clichés of coming up: *"As the disco ball turns, I get a new insight/Way up on a high plateau/That's a really cool tattoo."*

For "Daddy Come Home", Weymouth's poignant dream of her father becomes a proto-acid jig coasting on the lurid drone of Dougie Pincock's bagpipes.

"Who Wants An Ugly Girl?", a reggae number sung by a self-conscious Weymouth, would get Tom Tom Club cancelled these days, and forms a stumbling block in sequence with "You Sexy Thing". But these are the weakest moments on an album that reminds you what a casually ambitious group Tom Tom Club could be, almost effortless in the way they threw together ideas and didn't seem to care what others thought. Naturally curious and playful, and blessed with an awesome rhythm section, this – their pick'n'mix art-pop pinnacle – arrived at the wrong time, when circumstances had conspired against them, their audience had deserted them, and even they had started to believe the band was becoming a lost cause. ▲

DAVID BYRNE IN THE 2000s

RELEASED: 2001–2008

A decade of great intoxication: with music, and with sound. Byrne's genre-hopping excursions of the 2000s feature jazz, opera, even hymns. Small wonder a reunion with Eno was on the cards. BY TYLER WILCOX

BY THE time the 21st century rolled around, David Byrne could look back proudly on a fertile 25 years' worth of creative activity. He'd made hit singles and critically acclaimed albums. He'd played countless sold-out shows. He'd founded a record label. He'd written, directed and starred in movies. He'd hosted TV shows. He'd scored films, ballets and theatre pieces. Nevertheless, for a majority of the public, he was still The Man In The Big Suit.

"There are still plenty of people that I run into on the street who go, 'Talking Heads, love Talking Heads. What have you been doing for the last 14 years?'" Byrne told the AV Club in 2004. "And I say, 'You know, I've been making records, keeping busy. Don't worry, I'm busy.'"

Being forever shackled to his former band's achievements no doubt annoyed him. But he took it in his stride. The 2000s saw a more relaxed Byrne emerging, one capable of celebrating his past without drowning in it. His ambitious, conceptual nature remained, but it was balanced by a wry smile more often than not. Maybe for the first time, The Man In The Big Suit felt comfortable in his own skin.

Settling into middle age, Byrne showed off his newly silver hair on the cover of 2001's **Look Into The Eyeball** VIRGIN, 2001 ★★★★. But it's one of the more youthful, most downright uplifting records he's ever made, packed with buoyant rhythms, poppy melodies and string-drenched arrangements. If anything, *...Eyeball* feels like a love letter to the power, possibilities and mystery of music. "*Who's been playing records in his bedroom?*" Byrne asks in "The Great Intoxication". The answer is definitely Byrne himself. He'd always been omnivorous in his tastes, but he was absolutely drunk on sound in the early 2000s. Over the course of 12 tracks, Byrne gleefully hops from continent to continent, from genre to genre like a hummingbird in search of the perfect blossom.

"UB Jesus" kicks things off with a swampy, percussion-heavy beat, the song's narrator finding ecstasy and transcendence in seemingly dangerous religious rituals. "*Maybe I'm gonna fry in hell/But I feel good when I burn myself*," Byrne sings wildly, before dropping into a soaring chorus. "The Revolution" follows, continuing the theme of transformation, both public and private, with a heroine (perhaps the same lady from "And She Was"?) who quietly changes the world through thought, art and music.

The breezy soul bounce of "Neighborhood" is irresistible, the aural equivalent of a summer bike ride through the West Village; at the time, Byrne was an avid cyclist, eventually publishing 2009's *The Bicycle Diaries*, an ode to travelling on two wheels. "Like Humans Do" is similarly infectious, with the rhythm section of bassist Paul Frazier and drummer Shawn Pelton providing a deeply funky backdrop for one of Byrne's most joyous vocals. The song's lyrics, however, add more than a touch of ambiguity to what is otherwise a very danceable number: "*I'm achin'/I'm shakin'/Like humans do.*" But the divine is within reach. The gospel-heavy "Walk On Water" imagines Jesus returning as a DJ – a Second Coming with hilariously mixed results: "*He's got amplifiers, microphones/Record players, God only knows/All the girls say, 'Shut up and give me the groove.'*"

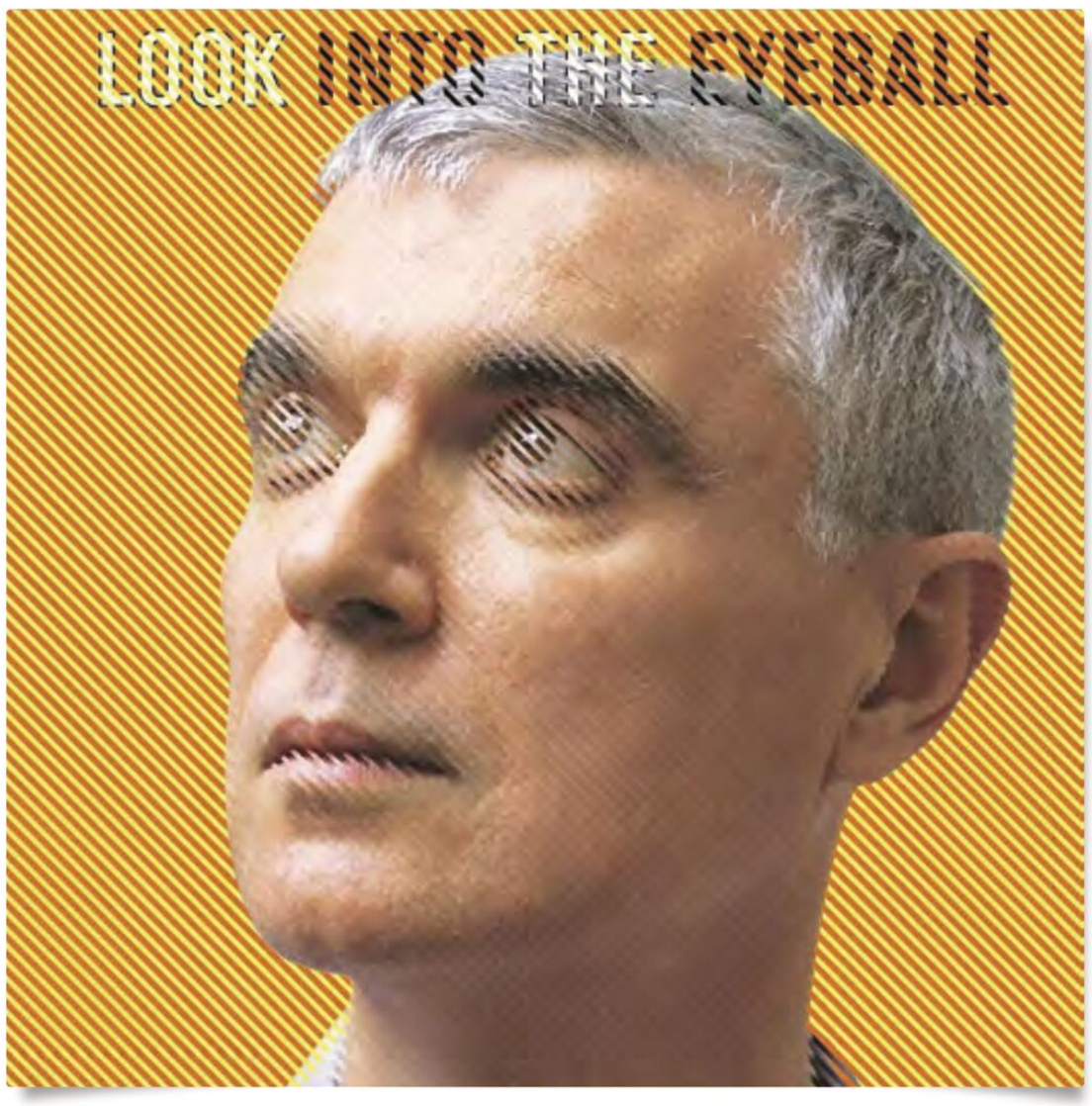
The groove is readily apparent on "Desconocido Soy", which features Byrne and Café Tacuba singer Nrü duetting in Spanish over a burbling electronica backing. The title translates as "I Am Unknown", an existential sentiment, perhaps, but the overall impression you get from the song is one of happiness in this unknowing state, a never-ending sense of discovery. Knowing your true self isn't the point. The search is what sustains us. Another question Byrne poses during "The Great Intoxication": "*Who's still painting his masterpiece?*" Again, the answer is David.

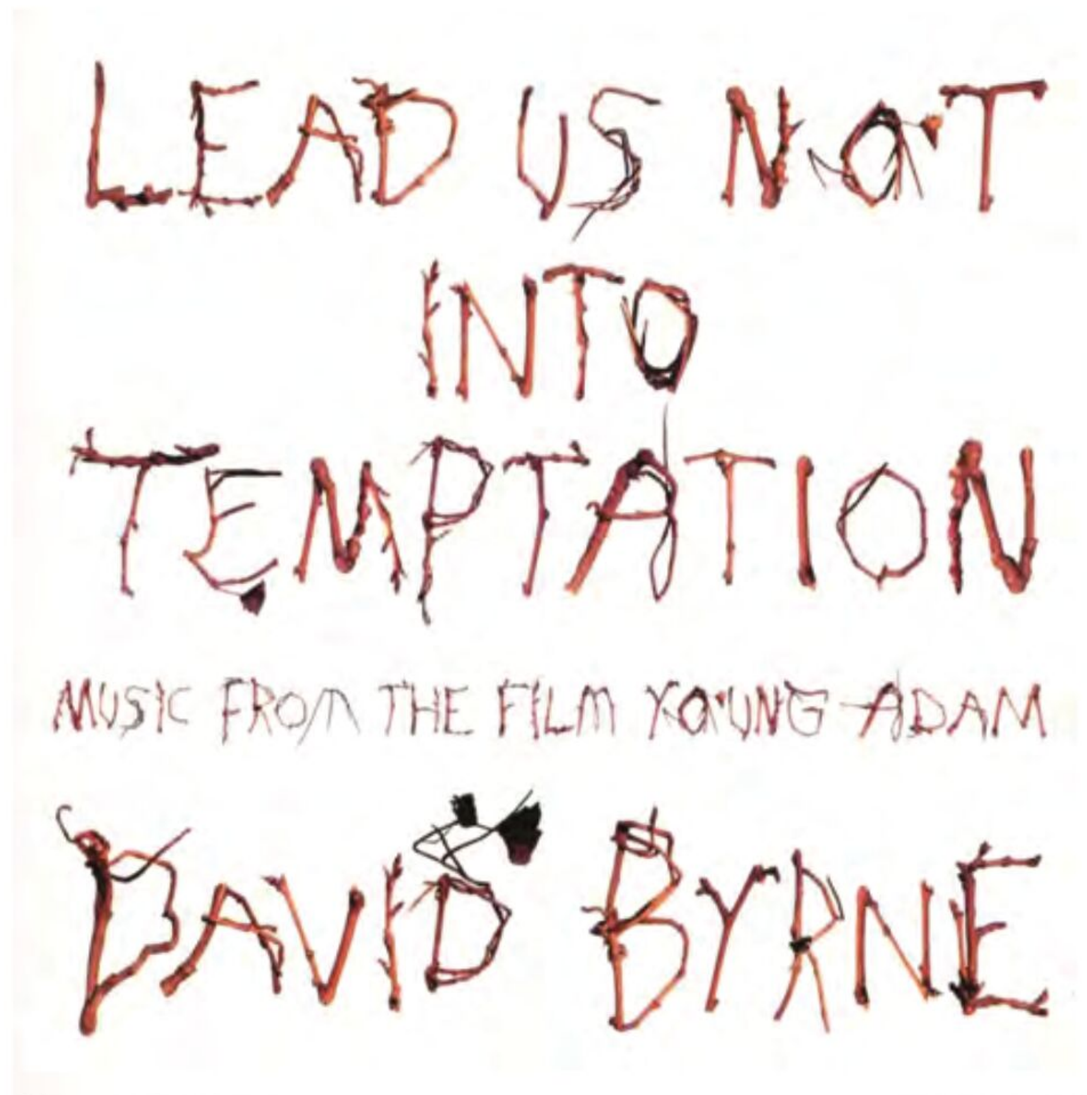
Byrne took *Look Into The Eyeball* on the road in 2001 with a full string section, ▶

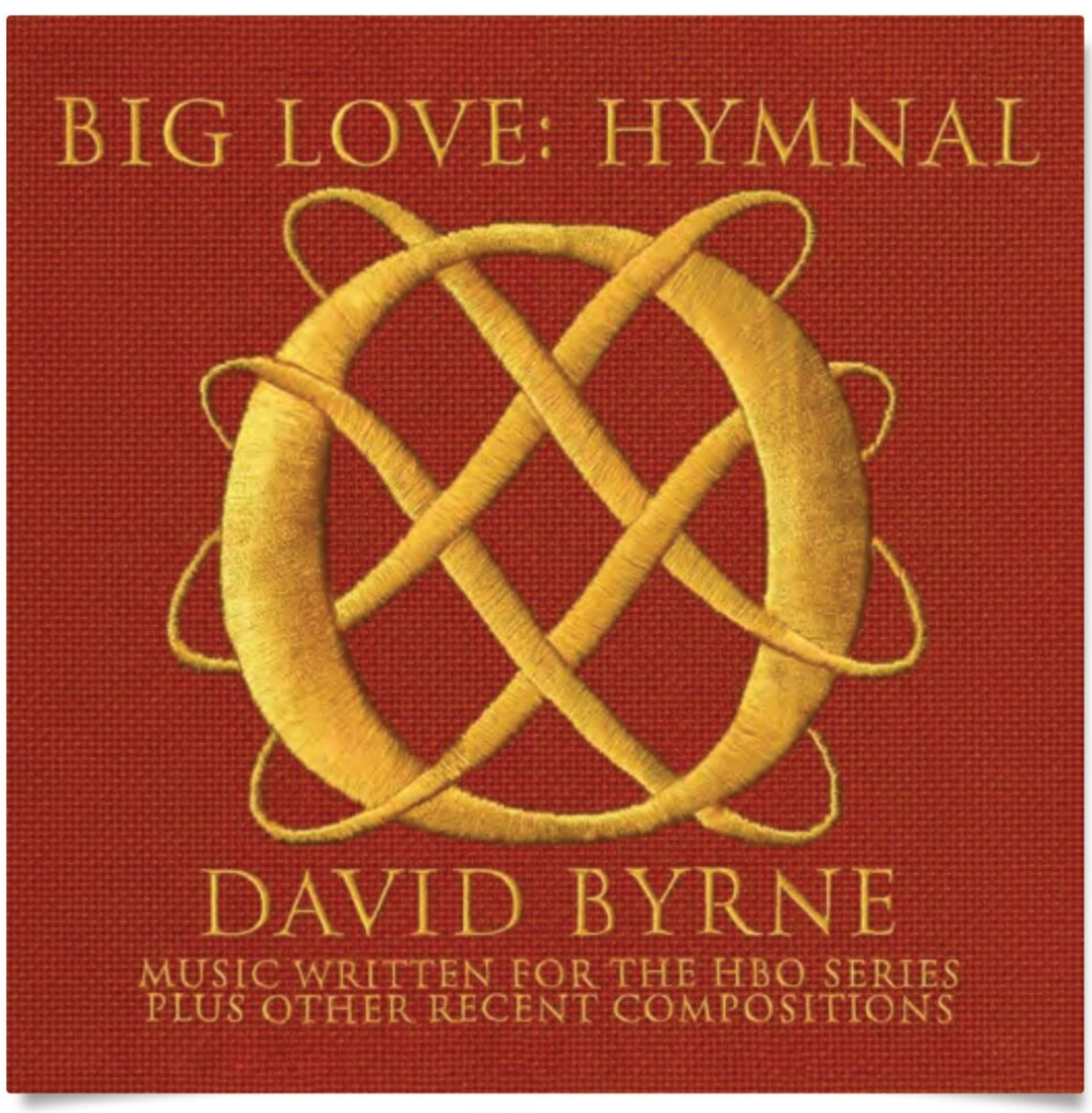
CRITICS' VERDICT

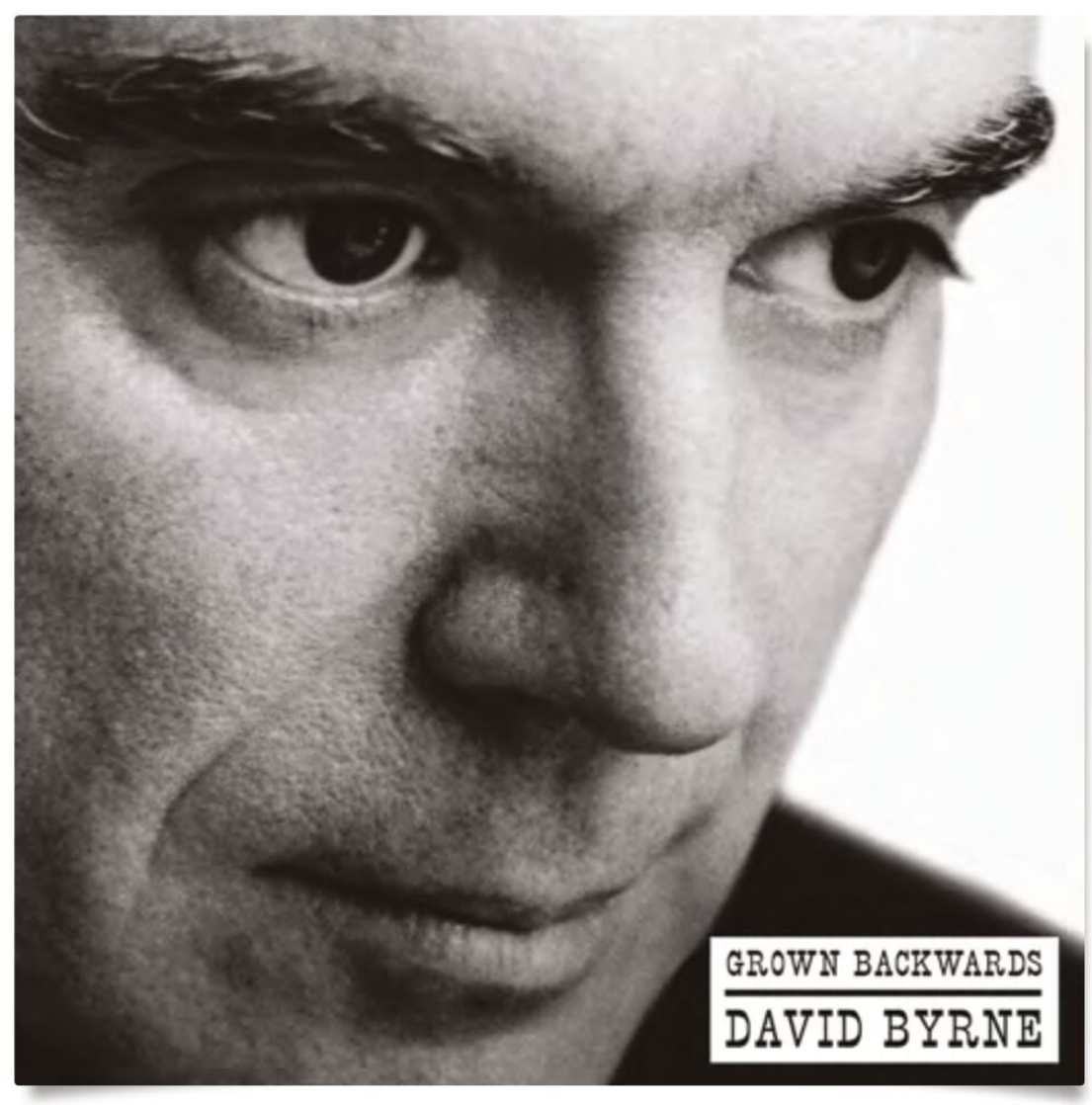
LOOK INTO THE EYEBALL
"Despite including Byrne's first Spanish-language song, Latin-American influences are assimilated here into a more eclectic, mature style with elegant string and wind arrangements."
ANDY GILL, UNCUT, AUGUST 2015

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION
"Byrne's soundtrack to the *Young Adam* film was made in collaboration with members of Belle & Sebastian and Mogwai, whose improv skills lend themselves to the LP's sombre charms."
ANDY GILL, UNCUT, AUGUST 2015


LOOK INTO THE EYEBALL


LEAD US NOT
INTO
TEMPTATION
MUSIC FROM THE FILM YOUNG ADAM
DAVID BYRNE


BIG LOVE: HYMNAL
DAVID BYRNE
MUSIC WRITTEN FOR THE HBO SERIES
PLUS OTHER RECENT COMPOSITIONS


GROWN BACKWARDS
DAVID BYRNE

WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

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Roots manoeuvre: Byrne rests between intercontinental creative journeys

offering up lively reimagined versions of both his solo and Talking Heads tunes.

BYRNE HAD won both an Oscar and a Golden Globe for his work on *The Last Emperor* score with Ryuichi Sakamoto and Cong Su. But despite this early success, he didn't seem too interested in pursuing that line of work again until 2003, when he scored David Mackenzie's *Young Adam*, a dark crime noir set in Byrne's native Scotland and starring Ewan McGregor, Tilda Swinton and Emily Mortimer. At the time, *Uncut* referred to the film as "brooding" and "narcotically slow". And those descriptions work pretty well when it comes to Byrne's contributions, too. Released by the Chicago indie label Thrill Jockey, **Lead Us Not Into Temptation: Music From The Film Young Adam** THRILL JOCKEY, 2003 ★★★ is an undiscovered gem in the musician's catalogue, mixing cool Angelo Badalamenti-esque jazz (and even a storming Charles Mingus cover) with drifting, atmospheric modern classical pieces. It's primarily instrumental, but Byrne steps up to the mic at the end for two moody vocal numbers, the haunting "Great Western Road" being particularly strong and well worth seeking out if this one slipped under your radar. And if ...*Temptation* whets your appetite for more of Byrne's soundtrack work, dig up 2008's **Big Love: Hymnal** TODOMONDO/HBO/PLAYTONE ★★★, which the musician wrote for the second season of HBO's fundamentalist Mormon series. Inspired by traditional Mormon hymns, these compositions are rich in major-key melodies and uplifting horn and string arrangements. Like the show itself, there's an underlying satirical element here as well – Byrne winkingly titles one of the tunes "Exquisite Whiteness", after all.

For his next solo record proper, Byrne went even further out of his comfort zone – into a realm closer to the Lincoln Center than CBGB's. 2004's **Grown Backwards** NONESUCH/WARNER BROS ★★★★ saw the ever-fearless artist tackle Bizet and Verdi, both longtime staples of the opera world. The weird thing is it actually works, especially on "Au Fond Du Temple Saint", a creamy duet with Rufus Wainwright. Can this possibly be the same vocalist who yelped and growled his way through the 1970s? Is he really going to hit those high notes? "I see them as pop songs," Byrne told Carol Cooper in *The L Magazine* of his operatic phase. "If anything I see myself as involved in the work of rescuing these marvellous songs from the over-stylised and rarified context they've been put in. They've been held prisoner and they deserve to be given a little more freedom."

Grown Backwards isn't the full Pavarotti, though. Rather, it's a typically eclectic collection; at 15 tracks, the album is perhaps a little bit overstuffed with ideas and styles. But for the most part, Byrne pulls it all together nicely, creating one of his most satisfying and mature solo albums, most of it prominently featuring the sterling work of the Tosca Strings collective. It begins with the stirring orchestral pop of "Glass, Concrete & Stone", another in Byrne's ongoing examinations of how the everyday and the spiritual can merge in strange and unexpected ways. "*Let my body and soul be my guide*," he sings over a dramatically swelling backing. It's a statement of faith in one's own humanity in the face of an often uncaring modern world. Is flesh and blood any match for all this glass, concrete and stone? Byrne then moves onto another left-field cover, but this isn't opera: it's a version of

CRITICS' VERDICT

BIG LOVE HYMNAL
"Music for a drama series on Mormon polygamists, ingeniously evoking the wistful flavour of old pioneer hymns in an upscale Americana palette of brass-band horns, genteel strings and minimalist repetitions. Think teatime with Van Dyke Parks and Sufjan Stevens."
ANDY GILL, UNCUT, AUGUST 2015

EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS WILL HAPPEN TODAY
"A more demarcated collaboration, with Eno's unfinished grooves developed and sung by Byrne, whose lyrics treat decrepitude and death with maturity and warmth. A beguiling, consolatory work."
ANDY GILL, UNCUT, AUGUST 2015

TONY BUCKINGHAM/REDFERNS

Lambchop's "The Man Who Loved Beer" that gives Kurt Wagner's oblique song an elegant setting recalling John Cale's "Paris 1919". Stretching back to his Talking Heads days, Byrne has always had a good ear for a song to put his own spin on, and this one is no exception.

Released in an election year, *Grown Backwards* seems preoccupied with a divided, post-9/11 United States. Indeed, "Empire" is a heartfelt plea for unity: "*The past and the future, they belong to us all,*" Byrne sings over horns arranged by legendary jazz composer Carla Bley. The beautifully drifting "Astronaut" is less optimistic. "*The world is a hornet's nest,*" the singer decides. Better off in outer space. Despite these concerns, Byrne was still willing to shut up and give us the groove. The album's closer, "Lazy", a collab with deep house duo X-Press 2, became a surprise hit on the dancefloor, climbing to No 2 on the British charts.

BYRNE'S PARTNERSHIP with Brian Eno ran hot and heavy for several years in the late 1970s and early 1980s, resulting in some of both artists' best (and best-known) work. So expectations were understandably high when news broke of **Everything That Happens Will Happen Today** TODO MUNDO, 2008 ★★★, the pair's first full-fledged collaboration since 1981. It wasn't quite like the old days, however. "This one was a really clear split between me taking his tracks and writing on top of them," Byrne told *Pitchfork*. "Occasionally I'd throw in a guitar solo or something else, but for the most part I stayed clear of it, because I thought, 'OK then, we'll stay out of each other's hair.'"

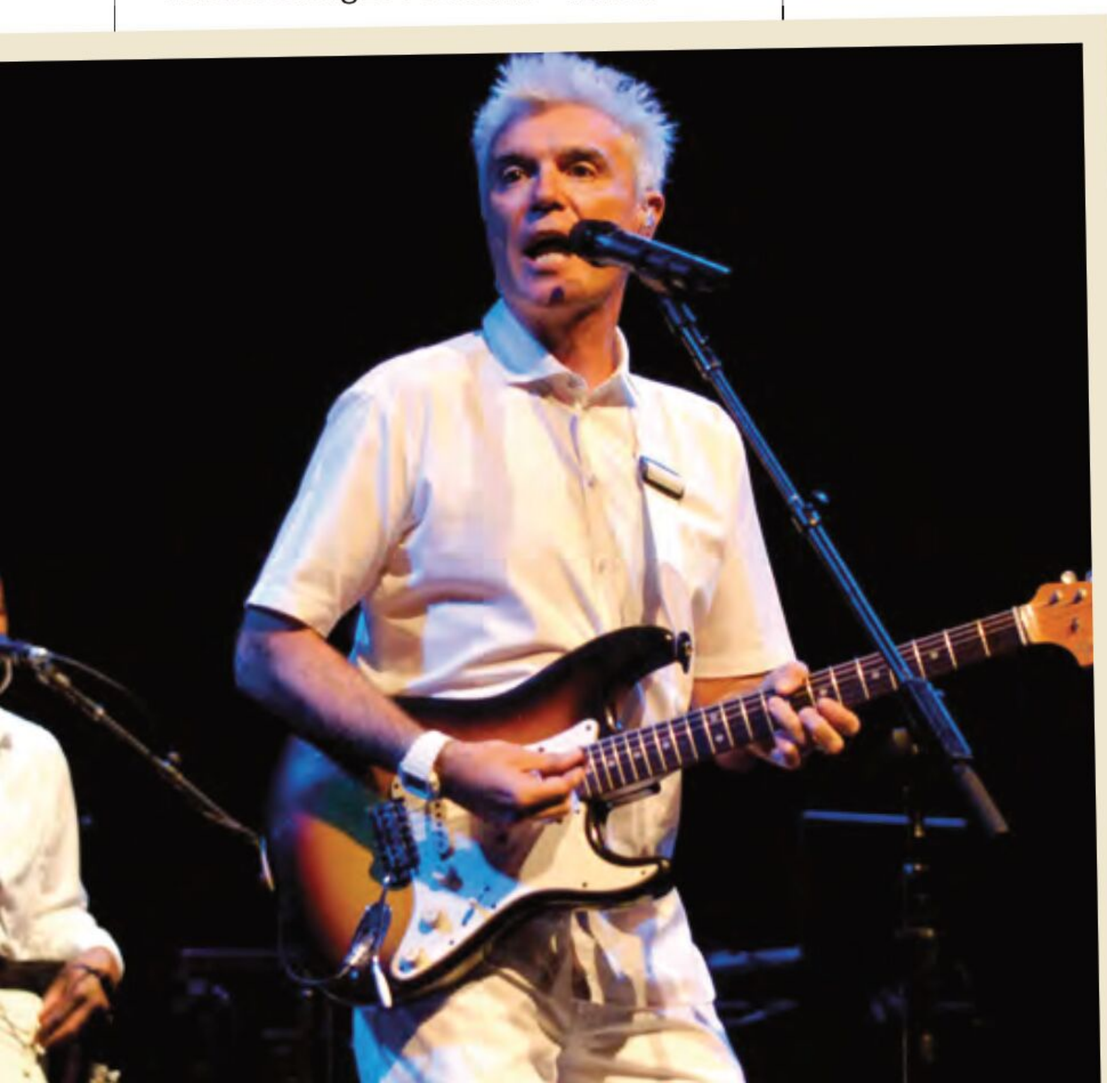
The resulting 2008 album – which Byrne and Eno called "electronic gospel" – skewed towards the conventional; anyone hoping for the wild imagination of *Remain In Light* or *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts* was probably disappointed. But that's not to say that *Everything...* isn't anything. On the contrary, whatever it lacks in innovation, it makes up for in warmth, melody and rhythm.

Especially the latter. Byrne and Eno may have been well into their fifties at the time, but they still loved a funky beat. Check out the LP's first single, "Strange Overtones" – the title itself a perfect distillation of Byrne and Eno's team-ups. The track's gentle disco shuffle and Byrne's uncharacteristic falsetto croon leads into a big, hooky chorus, with David and Brian's voices blending in their inimitable way: "*Strange overtones in the music you are playing/I'll harmonise/It is strong and you are tough/But a heart is not enough.*" The pair move into darker, more adventurous areas occasionally. "I Feel My Stuff" echoes the relentless grind of "Memories Can't Wait" and "Wanted For Life" features nasty, nagging synths, showing Eno's rough edges hadn't been entirely smoothed away over the years.

But generally, *Everything That Happens Will Happen Today* stays in a mellow place musically, with Byrne and Eno indulging their love of gospel-tinged song forms and lyrics – remember, these are the same guys who covered "Take Me To The River" back in 1977. The opener, "Home", sets the tone, with patient acoustic guitars, full-throated backing vocals and a meditative midtempo beat. The soothing vibe gets a little less soothing when you pay attention to what Byrne is singing, though. The home depicted here is not a much-loved nest; it's filled with arguing neighbours, privacy-invading cameras, and parents who may or may not be telling the truth. It turns out home may not be where David actually wants to be.

Eno didn't join up for the *Everything That Happens...* world tour in 2008 and 2009, but Byrne pitched the shows as a celebration of "The Songs of David Byrne and Brian Eno". This gave him the opportunity to build a setlist that mixed the album's new works with some of his most beloved Talking Heads tunes. Never let it be said that Byrne doesn't understand marketing. The resulting 2009 live EP is a strong effort, with a crackling band and an energised Byrne. But the tour is best experienced after the fact via *Ride, Rise, Roar*, a documentary/concert film released in 2011. Here we get to see the full production come together, from rehearsals to concert halls. In a preview of his recent Broadway run, the gigs featured exuberantly quirky modern dancers accompanying and enhancing the music, Byrne often getting in on the fun. It's no *Stop Making Sense*, but The Man In The Big Suit would probably approve. ▲

GROWN BACKWARDS SAW THE EVER-FEARLESS ARTIST TACKLE BIZET AND VERDI, STAPLES OF THE OPERA WORLD. THE WEIRD THING IS IT ACTUALLY WORKS



Performing Byrne/Eno songs old and new on the Everything That Happens Will Happen On This Tour tour, Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, October 6, 2008

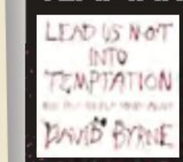
TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES

SLEEVENOTES

LOOK INTO THE EYEBALL

Released: May 8, 2001
Label: Virgin
Produced by: Michael Mangini
Recorded at: The Cutting Room Studio, Sound On Sound Studio, NYC
Highest chart position: UK 58; US 120

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION



Released: September 30, 2003
Label: Thrill Jockey
Produced by: David Byrne
Recorded at: CaVa Sound Workshops, Glasgow
Highest chart position: UK –; US –

BIG LOVE: HYMNAL

Released: August 19, 2008
Label: Todo Mundo/HBO/Play Tone
Produced by: David Byrne
Recorded at: Kampo Studios, NYC
Highest chart position: UK –; US –

GROWN BACKWARDS

Released: March 16, 2004
Label: Nonesuch, Warner Bros
Produced by: David Byrne, Patrick Dillett
Recorded at: Kampo Studios, NYC; Tequila Mockingbird, Austin, Texas
Highest chart position: UK 88; US 178

EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS WILL HAPPEN TODAY

Released: August 18, 2008
Label: Todo Mundo
Produced by: David Byrne, Brian Eno, Leo Abrahams
Recorded at: Brian Eno's and Leo Abrahams' home studios, London; David Byrne's home studio, NYC
Highest chart position: UK 153; US 174

THE GOOD THE BAD AND THE FUNKY

RELEASED: SEPTEMBER 12, 2000

Chris and Tina take a back seat on their own record as an impressive roster of special guests bring their personalities to an album currently awaiting reissue. BY HANNAH VETTESE

AFTER A hiatus of eight years, Tom Tom Club returned with *The Good The Bad And The Funky*, an album title which proved more precise than they probably intended. Good? Yes, in parts. Bad? At times, yes it was. Funky? Yes, if not quite as legendarily so as in their pomp.

While they were away, the group's appeal had remained steady. New generations were discovering Talking Heads and also big-name '90s artists had been giving TTC their dues. Their songs, especially "Genius Of Love", were sampled and reworked by 2-Pac & Outlawz ("High Speed"), Mark Morrison ("Return Of The Mack") and Mariah Carey ("Fantasy"), among others, for their own chart-topping singles and albums.

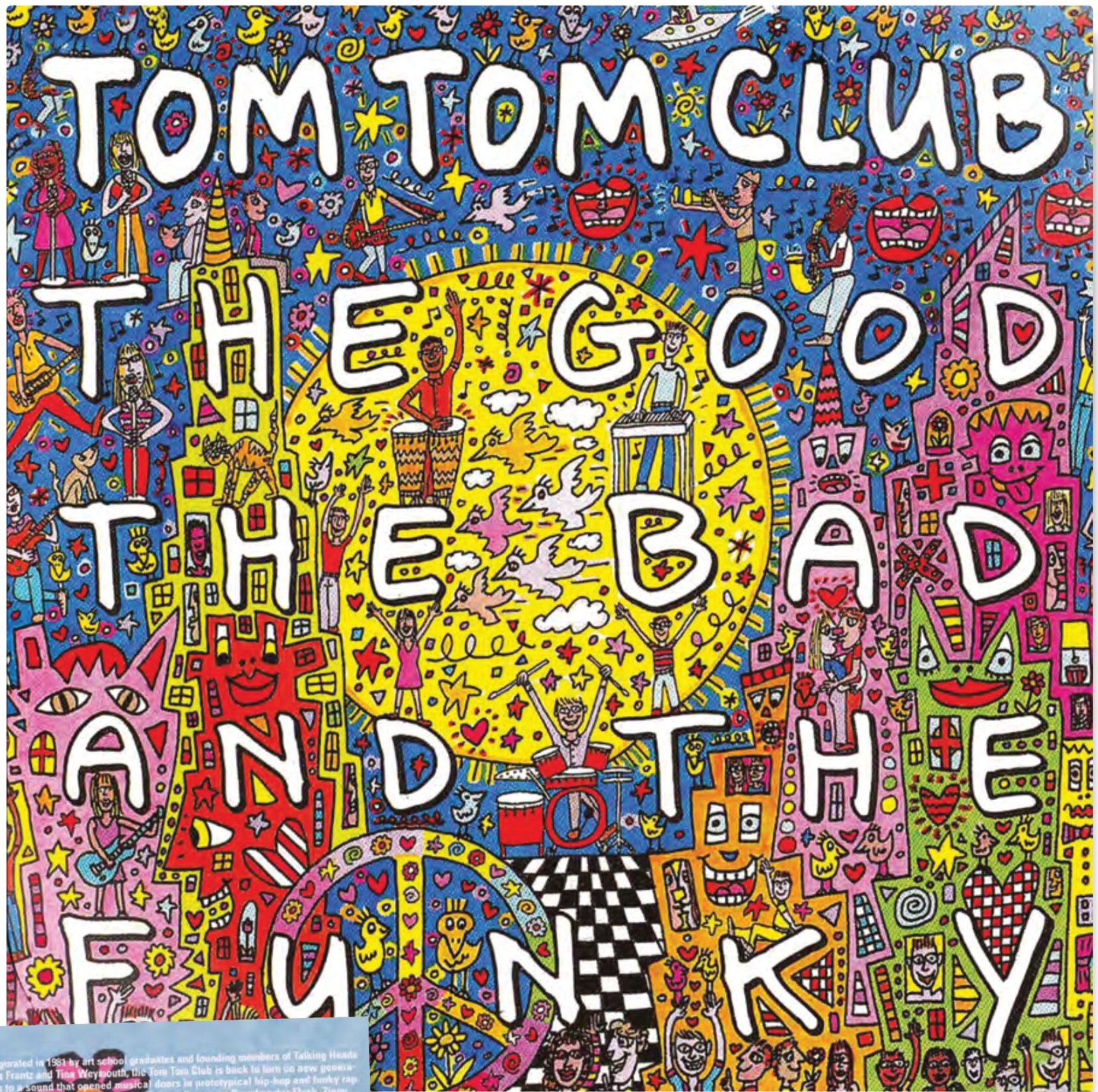
While Tom Tom Club were still adding the cherry on top to a lot of other people's records, Chris Frantz and Tina Weymouth spent the latter part of the '90s touring and working as The Heads and quietly raising their sons in Connecticut. Maybe in spite of that unassuming modus operandi, *The Good, The Bad And The Funky* aims pretty high. Some brilliant names are pulled in, including Toots Hibbert, Charles Pettigrew (from Charles & Eddie) and Bernie Worrell – the sensational keyboardist who was both a founding member of Parliament-Funkadelic and who'd lent his talents to much of Talking Heads' studio and live work from 1980 onwards, and who would be part of the band's 2002 induction into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame.

Perhaps that calibre of musicians set the bar too high, because opening track "Time To Bounce" fails to go anywhere too impressive. Sure, the rubbery bass and reggaeton stylings kick things off in an unexpected way, but lyrically and musically it proves pretty uninspiring.

"Who Feelin' It" bubbles along nicely, a slice of sunshine electro-pop, but its success is largely indebted to the fact it treads the same ground as "Genius Of Love", with Tina listing essential artists from Marvin Gaye, Grandmaster Flash, Afrika Bambaataa and of course, James Brown – as well as rehashing some of the best musical bits of the original, including the *"whatcha gonna do?"* refrain. It does, however, show that Tom Tom Club's early formula was a winning one.

Across the record, no stone is left unturned. Weymouth and Frantz's knowledge and appreciation of a wide array of genres and players is evident on every track. They rework Lee Perry & The Upsetters' "Soul Fire", with funky keyboard runs, Tina's ghostly backing vocals and a late '90s R&B sheen are welcome flourishes. Likewise, the following track, "She's Dangerous", is a riot of horns and percussion and Toots Hibbert's voice is pure joy. Admittedly, the album by this point feels less like a Tom Tom Club record, as their collaborators are bringing so much of themselves to the LP it feels as though Frantz and Weymouth are being sidelined to being session players on their own record.

This may pull opinion two ways. If you want something that is "traditional" Tom Tom Club – electro beats and Tina front and centre on most of the songs - then this may not be what you're looking for. However, Frantz and Weymouth are great at sharing a stage. They know when to build around another artist, or craft blissful sounds that propel performances forward. And these tracks are no exception. Not only that, the pair play so many instruments across the album that you get the sense this record embodies what TTC is really all about to them: playing around, finding new



TRACKMARKS

1. Time To Bounce ★★
2. Who Feelin' It ★★★
3. Happiness Can't Buy Money ★★★
4. Holy Water ★★
5. Soul Fire ★★★★
6. She's Dangerous ★★★★
7. She's A Freak ★
8. (C'Mon) Surrender ★★
9. Love To Love You Baby ★★
10. Superdreaming ★★
11. Lesbians By The Lake ★★★
12. Let There Be Love ★★★
13. Time To Bounce (Dub) ★★
14. Dangerous (Dub) ★★★

Label: Rykodisc/Tip Top Music
Produced by: Chris Frantz and Tina Weymouth
Personnel includes: Chris Frantz (drums, percussion, keyboards, loops, vocals), Tina Weymouth (organ, synthesiser, synthesiser bass, piano, acoustic guitar, bass, vocals), Bernie Worrell (organ, clavinet), Toots Hibbert (vocals), Charles Pettigrew (vocals), Abdou M'Boup (percussion, kora), Mystic Bowie (toasting), Sergio Rotman (electric guitar, saxophone), Robby Aceto (electric guitar, guitar effects), Bruce Martin (keyboards), Doug McKean (mixing, sample arrangements)
Highest chart position: UK -; US -

THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF A WIDE ARRAY OF GENRES IS EVIDENT ON EVERY TRACK

sounds, and having fun (...natural fun).

If every track isn't a winner ("She's A Freak" which follows "She's Dangerous" is hampered by its placement in the running order and feels like a lesser latter-day Madonna album track), then at least they are varied.

"(C'Mon) Surrender" brings back the slinky '90s R&B vibe, with Charles Pettigrew on both writing and performing duties. This rolls into the second cover on the album: the disco classic, "Love To Love You Baby". Does it have the gloss and sex appeal of Donna Summer's original? No, but it does have a smattering of classic Tom Tom Club effects and bouncy synth sounds, again, readily familiar from "Genius Of Love". A few songs on, and there's the instrumental, "Lesbians By The Lake", written by Weymouth, Frantz, and Abdou M'Boup, who also plays the kora. The combination of fuzzy beats and delicate finger-picking makes for an enigmatic palate cleanser before the album concludes with "Let There Be Love", Charles Pettigrew's powdery soft vocals floating over ethereal sound effects; a dub version of "Time To Bounce", and "Dangerous Dub".

THROUGHOUT THERE'S a fine line between what's weird and what's terrible. On the dancier numbers, Tom Tom Club cross the line quite a lot. With Frantz and Weymouth appearing more like they are pulling the strings rather than playing them, the album gets lost behind the sheer variety of sounds from one song to the next. However, with 20 years of hindsight, this record now feels like a precursor to the sort of records made as artist albums by name producers (like Mark Ronson). You pull in different musicians to bring their ideas to life and to pay homage to all the sounds you yourself enjoy. For TTC here, it's all too busy to afford them another collection of sample-worthy sounds, but they've been there, and done that. This record is less likely to make you want to get up and dance like others in their back catalogue, but with so much going on, it does make you pay close attention. ▲

DAVID BYRNE IN THE 2010s

RELEASED: 2010–2018

Collaboration is key to David Byrne's fine 2010s. If an opera with Fatboy Slim and an album with St Vincent miss their mark, his outrage with the new US president serves to reinvigorate Byrne's fire, his music, and his relevance. BY STEPHEN DALTON

ARTISTS OF David Byrne's venerable standing typically coast into their autumn years by playing it safe, milking an easy living from rose-tinted nostalgia and endlessly recycled greatest hits. But the silver-haired pop polymath chose the road less travelled, spending his sixties on a fertile spree of multimedia experimentation and pan-generational collaboration that arguably eclipses anything since his Talking Heads days. He began the second decade of the new millennium with an off-Broadway musical. He ended it by playing on Broadway himself, starring in one of the most acclaimed, imaginative, ambitious, exhilarating live shows of his long career. A song-and-dance spectacular which, many have claimed, rivals *Stop Making Sense* in its exuberant genius.

On paper, it might look like Byrne enjoyed a relatively lazy schedule in the 2010s, producing only one solo studio album and two collaborative long-players. But during this period he also created two stage musicals, made two live concert documentaries, wrote a book, launched an online magazine, hosted a major arts festival and worked on numerous other audio-visual projects. This was also the decade in which Byrne cemented his position as the most promiscuous collaborator in modern music, performing live and on record with dozens of artists from Brian Eno, Arcade Fire, De La Soul and Anna Calvi to high-school marching bands and community choirs.

Byrne's first album of the 2010s was an eccentric sideways step, the glitzy "poperetta" project **Here Lies Love** NONESUCH, 2010 ★★★. Written and recorded with Norman Cook, aka British superstar DJ Fatboy Slim, it was conceived as the soundtrack to a stage musical about Imelda Marcos, the infamous disco-loving First Lady of the Philippines. After years in gestation waiting for a festival or theatre to stage it, the duo eventually ran out of patience and opted to record their own all-star album version.

"It's obviously not too weird," an exasperated Byrne told *Fader* magazine in 2010. "It's me and Fatboy Slim. It's songs. It's not really weird. If it were more 'arty' we might have gotten further. The songs are actually quite catchy, but they aren't catchy in a Broadway sort of way. It's neither fish nor fowl. So, instead of staging it, I just decided to finish it as a record."

Rooted in retro-disco pastiche and tropical dance-pop grooves, *Here Lies Love* is an overstuffed mixtape that shades into easy-listening blandness in places. But it also contains uplifting moments of glittery Studio 54 glamour, and must surely rank as Byrne's most starry album to date, with its crowded guest list of mostly female divas including Cyndi Lauper, Tori Amos, Florence Welch, Róisín Murphy, Steve Earle, Santigold, Martha Wainwright and more.

Allison Moorer brings lush country-rock twang to the shimmering lament "When She Passed By", Sharon Jones lends soulful punch to the funk-pop belter "Dancing Together", and Natalie Merchant sounds menacingly wistful on "Order 1081", possibly the finest song ever written about the declaration of martial law. Byrne himself supplies a couple of vocals, most notably on the wry, self-ironic number "American Troglodyte".

Here Lies Love was finally staged as a fully realised musical at New York City's Public Theater in 2013, directed by Alex Timbers. It proved to be a rave-reviewed, sold-out, award-winning triumph. Wearing its *Evita* parallels lightly, this immersive production plunged the audience into a brightly hued mirrorball pageant of throbbing hedonism, murderous love rivalry and gaudy disco-dictator kitsch. In ▶

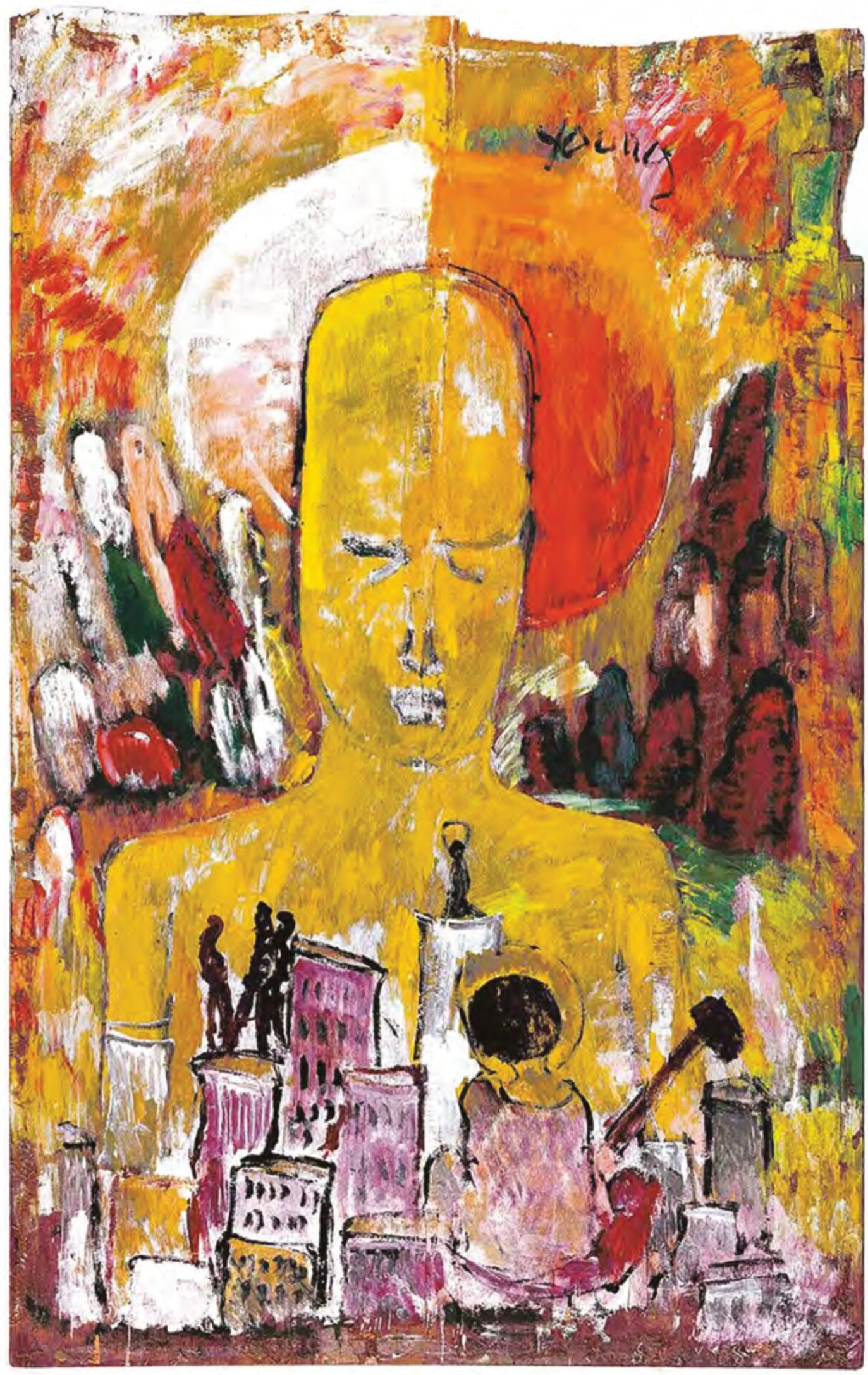
CRITICS' VERDICT

HERE LIES LOVE
"As a sketchy idea to an agent, this record makes a certain screwball sense – something like *Evita* meets *Boogie Nights* in the west Pacific." STEPHEN TROUSSÉ, UNCUT, MARCH 2010

LOVE THIS GIANT
"Based around a brass band and the tricksy drum programs of John Congleton, this 12-tracker succeeds in being technically impressive, but fails to engage the heart... a collection that feels more art project than album." GARRY MULHOLLAND, UNCUT, NOVEMBER 2012

David Byrne

AMERICAN UTOPIA



September 2014 a lightly tweaked version of this production transferred to London's National Theatre, with further successful runs to follow in New York and Seattle.

Meanwhile, Byrne was already busy with his next round of projects. His key album release of 2012 was **Love This Giant** 4AD/TODOMUNDO, 2012 ★★★, a full-length collaboration with art-pop diva St Vincent, aka Annie Clark. The pair first met at a series of charity benefit shows in 2009, and Clark also guested on the *Here Lies Love* soundtrack. She and Byrne subsequently began working on music together, which gradually evolved into a full album, released in September 2012.

Featuring ebullient brass-band arrangements courtesy of the Brooklyn-based Afrobeat collective Antibalas, *Love This Giant* has a jubilant New Orleans jazz feel in places, with Byrne and Clark alternating as lead vocalist on rousing carnival bone-shakers like "Who", "Dinner For Two" and "The One Who Broke Your Heart", the latter sounding like a throwback to Talking Heads circa *Little Creatures*. Intended as a role-reversal twist on *Beauty And The Beast*, the cover image features the duo in face-warping prosthetics with Byrne's chin extended into a preposterously square Buzz Lightyear bulge, adding to the album's vague hinterland of surreal, folksy, gothic Americana.

Overall, *Love This Giant* is a minor addition to Bryne's canon, although "Outside Of Space And Time" is a lovely melancholy crooner, while the stern art-funk stomper "I Should Watch TV" would later become a rousing live anthem when he and Clark embarked on a 74-date world tour. Featuring an eight-piece brass section and kinetic choreography by long-time Byrne collaborator Annie-B Parson, these dynamic shows now look like early exploratory blueprints for the triumphant *American Utopia* tour five years later.

Byrne was a frequent visitor to London's Southbank Centre in the middle of the decade. After shepherding *Here Lies Love* to the National Theatre in 2014, he returned the following summer to host the annual Meltdown Festival. Following in the footsteps of David Bowie, John Peel, Yoko Ono, Ornette Coleman, Jarvis Cocker, Patti Smith and others, he assembled an eclectic programme that included Matthew Herbert, Anna Calvi, Sunn O))), Eliza McCarthy and The Hypnotic Brass Ensemble. He spent part of this curation period staying at A Room For London, a quirky boat-shaped hotel suite perched atop the Queen Elizabeth Hall. A very Byrne touch.

Around the same time, Bryne became fascinated with the arcane but regionally popular Middle American subculture of "color guard" troupes, typically high-school students that perform highly choreographed, visually spectacular formation dance routines at sports events to a military marching band soundtrack. For a huge collective performance called *Contemporary Color*, Byrne paired up 10 troupes with 10 modern composers including himself, St Vincent, Tune-Yards, Dev Hynes, Ad-Rock, and Nelly Furtado. This culminated in two large festival shows, staged in Brooklyn and Toronto in June 2015. A dazzling documentary of this project, directed by the fraternal duo Turner and Bill Ross, was released in 2017.

Byrne's late-career winning streak suffered a rare wobble in 2017. Reuniting with *Here Lies Love* director Alex Timbers at New York's Public Theater, he wrote and scored another historical stage musical, *Joan Of Arc: Into The Fire*. Starring Jo Lampert, the production met with universally tepid reviews when it opened in February. Several critics likened Byrne's bloodless soft-rock soundtrack to Andrew Lloyd Webber.

"How did the immense talents behind *Here Lies Love* come up with something so inert?" *The New York Times* pondered. "Those of us who have admired Byrne's eclectic output for 40 years can only hope the musical chameleon puts this monotonous misfire behind him fast and moves on to more stimulating projects," *The Hollywood Reporter* scolded. *Joan Of Arc: Into The Fire* closed after just 10 weeks, and no soundtrack album has yet emerged.

LIKE MANY artists, Byrne reacted to Donald Trump's shock 2016 election victory with rage. "He's a fucking racist," the singer seethed to *Rolling Stone* in a rare departure from his usual sunny, golly-gee demeanour. But the lateral-thinking avant-pop guru soon responded to the Trump's polarising populism in a smarter, more counter-intuitive fashion by launching *Reasons To Be Cheerful*, a webzine that celebrates positive ideas and shared connections across the political spectrum. Describing the platform as "part magazine, part therapy session, part blueprint for a better world", Byrne claimed its mission was to "balance out some of the amplified negativity and show things might not be as bad as we think".

Born from this unifying, defiantly optimistic manifesto, Byrne's most significant release of the last decade was his 2018 album **American Utopia** NONESUCH/TODOMUNDO, 2018 ★★★★. Recorded in New York and London, this celebratory collection was billed at Byrne's first solo album in 14 years, even though it actually began as a joint project with Brian Eno. Over time the music morphed into more of a Byrne solo affair, but Eno is still credited as a co-writer on most tracks as well as providing "robot rhythm guitar" on the album's stand-out party anthem, "Everybody's Coming To My House", a joyous fusion of post-punk dance-pop and slippery Afro-tropical rhythms.

American Utopia features multiple collaborators from both sides of the Atlantic, including Daniel Lopatin (aka Oneohtrix Point Never), Hot Chip/The xx producer Rodaidh McDonald, and Mercury prize-winner Sampha. The album has a sonically rich palette, sprinkled with studio fuzz and fizz, light-touch electronica and warm, grainy vocals. Byrne's playful lyrics, meanwhile, alternate between stream-of-conscious surrealism and juvenile humour. "*The pope don't mean shit to a dog*," he muses on the radiant gospel-pop toe-tapper "Everyday Is A Miracle", while the softly glowing ambient ballad "Bullet" cheerfully

CRITICS' VERDICT

AMERICAN UTOPIA
"*American Utopia* is at some level, like *Everthing That Happens...* another collaboration with Brian Eno. That LP had a dated feel, but there was a great charm in hearing the massed Enoid choir once again supporting Byrne's quizzical lead. This time around the songs are based on drum tracks that Eno programmed, but he takes a back seat. It makes you wonder whether Byrne needs more active, engaged collaborators to really provoke him to greatness. Left to his own devices, Bryne comes home to a screwball hymnal mode that, for all the lyrical left turns, can feel a little too predictable."
STEPHEN TROUSSÉ, UNCUT, APRIL 2018

Annie's song: St Vincent on stage with Byrne at the Greek Theatre, LA, October 13, 2012

CHELSEA LAUREN/WIREIMAGE

plots the devastating path of a gunshot as it rips through a body.

A significant critical and commercial milestone in Byrne's latterday career, *American Utopia* charted at No 16 in the UK and No 3 in the US, his highest ever solo placing. But it was the jaw-dropping live show accompanying the album that transformed it into a major cultural event.

Building on elements from his previous decade of tours, Byrne put together a dazzling audio-visual spectacular based around an artfully bare stage and a bare-footed troupe of singer-dancer-musicians, all dressed in matching grey suits. The career-spanning setlist mixed *American Utopia* material with older solo tracks and Talking Heads classics, all played in explosively funky marching-band arrangements on portable wireless instruments. Choreographed once more by Annie-B Pearson, the 66-year-old Byrne proved impressively athletic, keeping pace with his youthful band for almost two hours of rubber-limbed, precision-drilled gymnastics.

Byrne described the *American Utopia* live show as his most elaborate since the legendary Talking Heads tour immortalised in *Stop Making Sense*, Jonathan Demme's revered 1984 concert film. "With *Stop Making Sense*, we brought everything onstage so people could see what it takes to put on a show," he told *Rolling Stone*. "With this, I'm taking everything away." The parallels were hard to avoid when the tour opened in March 2018, with enraptured critics invoking Demme's film as flattering comparison.

BYRNE DESCRIBED THE AMERICAN UTOPIA LIVE SHOW AS HIS MOST ELABORATE SINCE THE TALKING HEADS TOUR IMMORTALISED IN STOP MAKING SENSE

Precision-drilled euphoria: (above) Byrne and company on the *American Utopia* world tour at Spark Arena, Auckland, New Zealand, November 17, 2018

At the climax of each show, Byrne and his band counterpointed all this head-spinning euphoria with Janelle Monáe's "Hell You Talmbout", a powerful protest anthem about African-American victims of police brutality. "I remember first thinking, 'Should an older white guy do this song?'" the veteran art-rocker told *Rolling Stone*. "So I gave Janelle a call, and she loved the idea. We tried it out in our show, and it's kind of a punch to the gut for the audience, once they realise what it's all about. But it's a moving and important song." This inspired cover later gained extra political and emotional force during the Black Lives Matter protests around the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and others.

Expanding from mid-sized theatres to cavernous arenas during 2018, the *American Utopia* tour propelled Byrne back into the premier league of live rock performers. In October 2019, he brought the show to Broadway for a four-month residency at the Hudson Theater, adding a modified setlist and more spoken-word interludes. A live album of the Broadway show was released that same month. Without its theatrical visuals and Byrne's droll banter, much of the music feels diminished, though the brass-heavy Afro-funk remakes of "I Zimbra", "Slippery People" and "Blind" all pack a mighty punch.

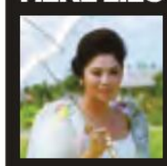
A much more impressive record of this show is Spike Lee's *American Utopia* concert documentary, which premiered at the Toronto Film Festival in September 2020 before arriving on HBO in October 2020. A supreme visual stylist himself, Lee was an inspired choice of director, reconnecting Byrne with his post-punk roots in the multicultural melting pot of early 1980s downtown New York as well as reinforcing the live show's underlying message of political rage and racial unity.

Byrne could have spent his silver-haired sixties resting on his considerable laurels as a much-loved elder statesman of New York art-rock. Instead the 68-year old rounded off the last 10 years as a more creatively vital, commercially successful and socially engaged figurehead than at any time since his Heads prime. Can he top this new career peak? The next decade should be very interesting indeed. ▲

DAVE SIMPSON/WIREIMAGE

SLEEVENOTES

HERE LIES LOVE



Released: April 6, 2010
Produced by: David Byrne, Fatboy Slim, Cagedbaby (Thomas Gandey, Patrick Dillett and Los Amigos Invisibles)
Recorded at: South Hell Studios, New York City
Highest chart position: UK 76; US 96

LOVE THIS GIANT

Released: September 10, 2012
Produced by: David Byrne, Annie Clark and co-production by Patrick Dillett and John Congleton
Recorded at: Water Music Studio, Hoboken, New Jersey; Patrick Dillett's Studio, New York City
Highest chart position: UK 40; US 23

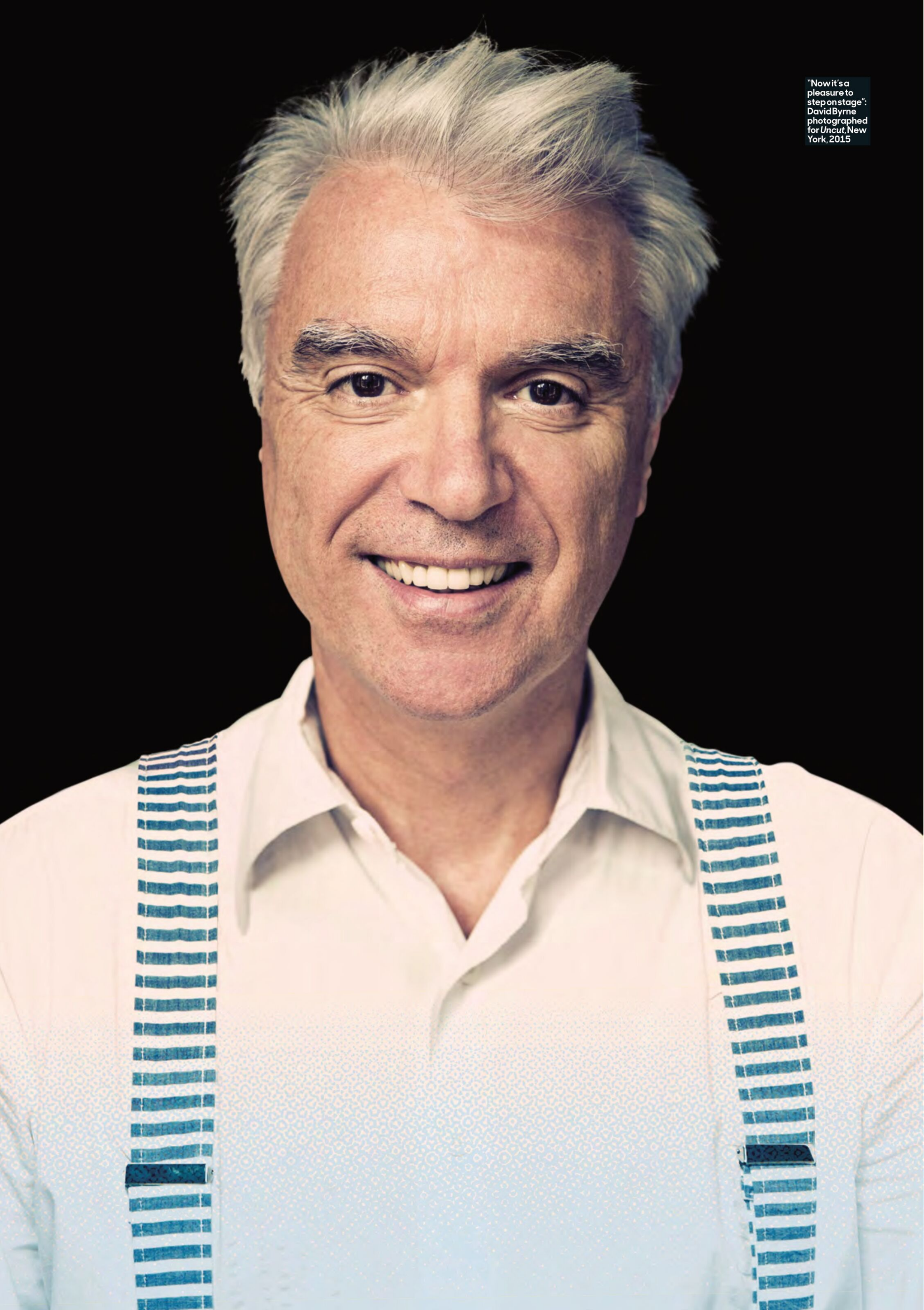
AMERICAN UTOPIA

Released: March 9, 2019
Produced by: David Byrne, Brian Eno, Rodaidh McDonald, Patrick Dillett
Recorded at: DB Spare Bedroom, Reservoir Studios, Oscilloscope, XL Studios, Crowdspacer Studio, New York City; Livingston Studio 1, London
Highest chart position: UK 16; US 3

"There was a lot of trial and error"

Beyond the tensions of Talking Heads ("They're out partying; I have my little pencil out..."), DAVID BYRNE's world has expanded. His 30-year solo career has included celebrated collaborations, work in theatre and film, record labels – and now the challenge of curating London's Meltdown festival. In the "small city", *Uncut* probes him on his "fake Mormon hymns", the work with Brian Eno, and inventing hip-hop by accident. "As a musician, I started to become more comfortable... Not being bossy as such," he tells ANDY GILL, "but in making my intentions clear."

PIETER M VAN HATTEM



"Now it's a pleasure to step on stage": David Byrne photographed for *Uncut*, New York, 2015

Take him to the river: Meltdown curator Byrne at the Southbank Centre, London, August 2015

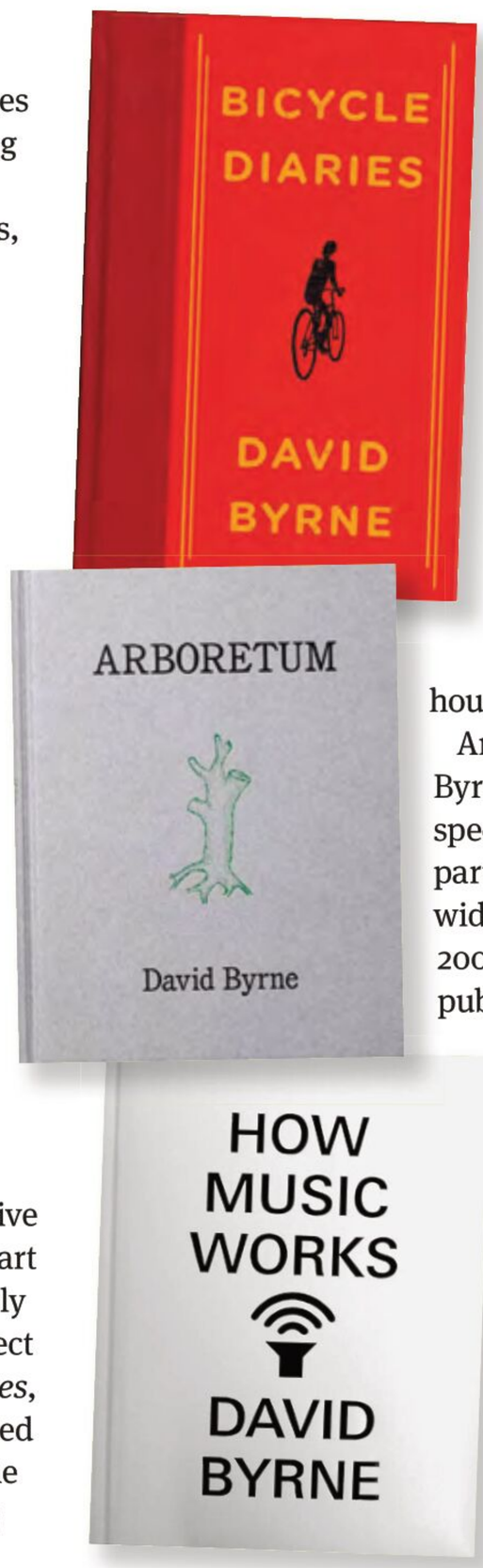
UNCUT NOVEMBER 2015

DAVID BYRNE has always had a striking sense of appearance, from the proto-preppy understatement of his early Talking Heads persona to the legendary Big Suit of *Stop Making Sense*. Today, his hair now strikingly silver, he's dressed in a cool seersucker suit, a sort of cross between upscale country cowpoke and intrepid safari-suited explorer. It's an apt look that hints at his exploratory cultural attitude, always searching out the unexpected and unusual.

We're in a room at the Royal Festival Hall, adjacent to an elevator programmed by Byrne's friend and frequent collaborator Brian Eno to produce keening choral glissandos depending on whether you're ascending or descending. Today, we're at the very upper limit of Eno's register, in a penthouse boardroom affording a marvellous widescreen vista of the Thames and across to the dome of St Paul's. Not that Byrne's paying the view too much attention. Like the untouched food on the table, it's ignored in favour of a preoccupation with the work at hand, which concerns his curating of this year's Meltdown, the scheduling of which he likens to Tetris, trying to get all these different acts in different venues at different times to fit in a harmonious sequence.

It is, you suspect, something Byrne enjoys: a tricky puzzle as much to be savoured as it is solved. Much of Byrne's remarkable career has similarly involved projects that enable him to push his own boundaries, taking him out of his comfort zone to work alongside musicians from different disciplines and corners of the world. In Talking Heads, he moved from art rock, through funk and African rhythms, while his solo career includes excursions into Latin pop, film soundtracks and a musical about Imelda Marcos. His Luaka Bop label, meanwhile, unearthed interdisciplinary world music like Indian psych, Brazilian tropicalismo and Southern gothic. All told, it is a remarkable, wide-ranging body of work – one that continues to evolve as Byrne's restless spirit brings him into contact with a new generation of collaborators such as St Vincent, Dirty Projectors and David Sitek. Above all, it underscores his continuing importance in an ever-changing musical landscape.

His cultural journeys often take Byrne into areas outside the purely musical: he has an impressive CV of dance and theatre work and art installations, and was miraculously able to get funding to co-write, direct and star in his own film, *True Stories*, whose quirky narrative was inspired by outlandish newspaper stories he had collected on tour with Talking Heads. "I was only able to raise the money for *True Stories* because Talking Heads were having pop hits," he admits. Times, though, are significantly tougher for the inspired independent auteur. "Nobody lost money on *True Stories*," he says. "But it would be harder for me to do that now. I did a documentary in Brazil, but even the financing for that had to come from several different countries, just to do something as small as a one-hour documentary."



An avid proponent of cycling, Byrne designed a series of location-specific bicycle-racks for various parts of New York, and has written widely on the subject, not least in his 2009 book *Bicycle Diaries*. His other publications have included an anthology of his tree drawings, *Arboretum*, and most pertinently, *How Music Works*, a fascinating reflection upon his core business which discusses the social uses of music, the modes of performance, the history of recording, and the thorny relationship between music and emotion: "Making music," he claims, "is like constructing

DANNY NORTH

a machine whose function is to dredge up emotions in performer and listener alike."

Which leads one to wonder at the variety of emotions that might be dredged up by Byrne's lineup for Meltdown Festival, which ranges from flamenco singer Estrella Morente to miasmic metal dronists Sunn O))), and from confessional songwriter Benjamin Clementine to Tibetan throat-musicians Phurpa; with performances as varied as Young Jean Lee's song-cycle about pain and death, "We're Gonna Die", John Luther Adams' contemporary classical work, "Across A Distance", and Atomic Bomb!'s presentation of the rediscovered electro-funk of William Onyeabor.

As with his record label, it tries to refocus attention on artists and performers, particularly those operating outside a mainstream increasingly colonised by corporate forces – an impulse which also recently led to Byrne joining the board of SoundExchange, an independent digital income collection organisation. "At the moment it's almost impossible for an artist to find out how many streams were sold, to calculate how much they're owed," he explains. "Consumers have no problem with paying Apple, or having their stuff watched over by Google; but to actually pay for the content...? The creator, in many cases, has been left behind, and other people are just cashing in. There needs to be some corrective."

UNCUT: You've become a serial collaborator...

DAVID BYRNE: I have! I was surprised to read some interviews with younger musicians about collaboration, and quite a few just didn't like the idea at all. There was a sense that collaboration is compromising your vision, your unique sense of what makes you, as an artist or writer, special. That to collaborate is to compromise. And to some extent it is; but sometimes you get something from the other side that goes beyond what you'd have come up with. It's a kind of mutual gain.

Are you ever overwhelmed by the prospect of a particular partner? Does it ever restrict or place a brake on the freedom?

No, just sometimes in a technical way. Sometimes the brake is helpful: all right, this is what they do, this is what I do, we have to work within these parameters. It's helpful in defining the area we're working within. I did one recently that hasn't come out yet, with the hip-hop group De La Soul; they asked if I could do something on one of their tracks that had some sections at one speed and others in a different tempo. I did something, and told them, "I don't know whether this works with what you're doing, I have no idea how you're going to get these tempo changes ▶

"DAVID NEEDS FREE REIN..."

ED STASIUM recalls his work on the earliest Talking Heads recordings

"I GOT the chance to work with them through my old friend Tony Bongiovi, who produced their early recordings. I bumped into him for the first time in years at a gig in NY, and he told me he was going to build a new studio, Sundragon, and would I like to be chief engineer? The first band I worked with there was the Ramones on *Leave Home*; but it was spring 1977 when I first worked with Talking Heads, at the Power Station, when Seymour Stein asked Tommy Erdelyi and Tony to produce 'Love → Building On Fire'. Then later, we cut the basic tracks for *Talking Heads: 77* at Sundragon.

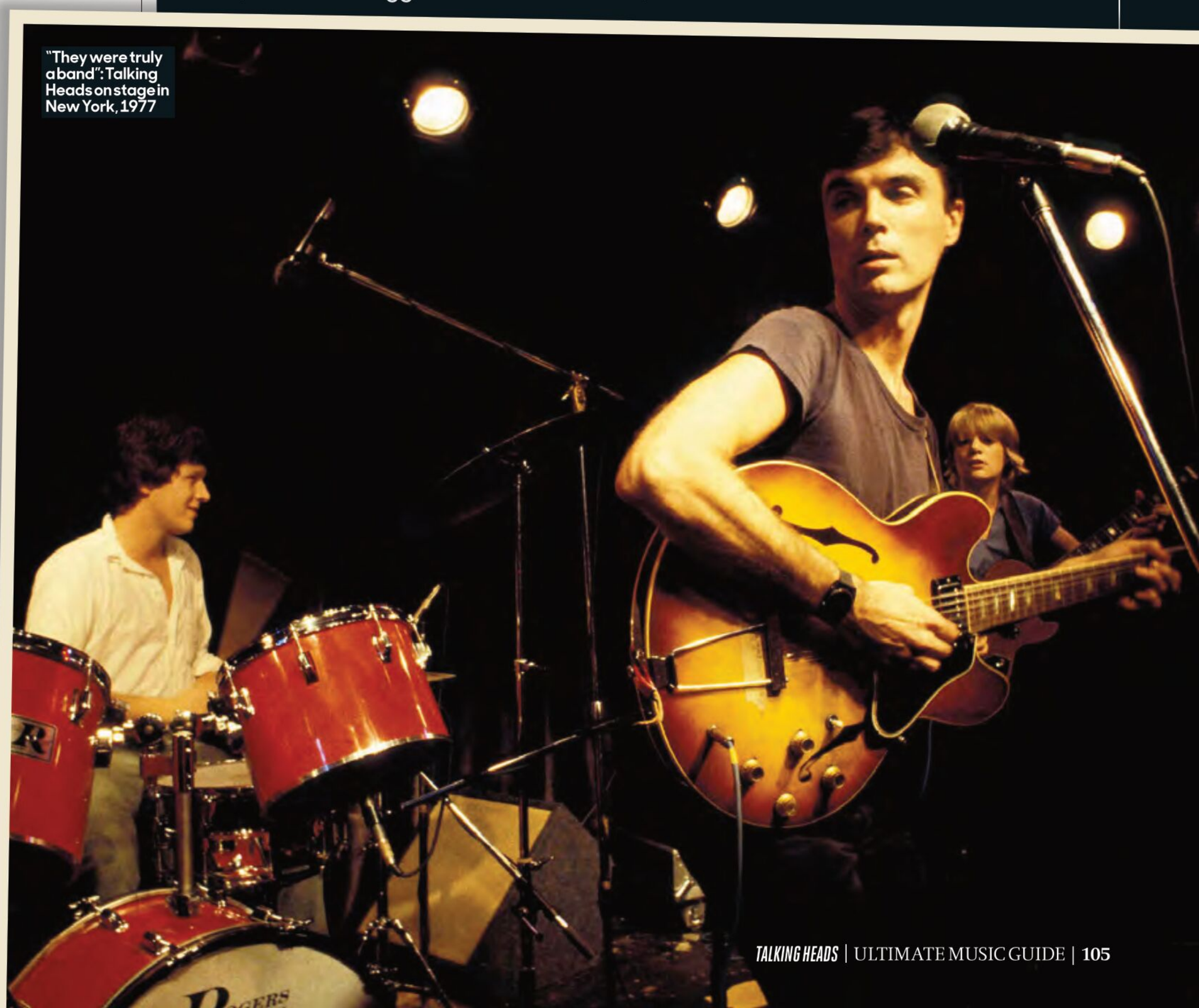
"The band were very sparse. When we started doing the album, Jerry Harrison was not even in the band, he was still one of The Modern Lovers. He came in later and overdubbed his parts. There were no particular instructions, and they didn't need any advice: they all had their parts down, and they didn't get any guidance from Tony Bongiovi, who was mostly just sat in the corner of the booth with his nose in an airplane magazine! It all came from the band; there was no producer telling these guys what to do. The sparseness was a reflection of their minimal style – we did just a few overdubs, mostly on vocals. It was all done live – Chris is a fantastic drummer, a real human metronome. The only edit I made in mixing was in the intro to 'Psycho Killer', which Tina suggested I should elongate. And the only time Tony gave his opinion was about David's singing – so David refused to do vocals with Tony in the room, just me! David is David, and like any great artist, needs free rein.

"I wasn't that familiar with the New York scene at that time. I'd been in Canada for a few years, and when I moved back, the first time I heard the Ramones was in the studio. And the first I heard of Talking Heads was a demo tape, though I did go and see them live before recording them. They're totally different bands – the biggest difference in their cases was attitude. The Ramones were truly a bunch of punk guys from Queens, while Talking Heads were more intellectual – which is not to disparage the Ramones, but their approaches were dissimilar.

"The band's sound started to change when Eno got involved on *More Songs About Buildings And Food*. Chris was in awe of him, the way he designed the sound differently. His new textures provided a stimulant, broadened their musical spectrum. I love the way they go from that sparse first album to the bigger, more complex sound they developed later.

"I know they had their differences later on, but when I was working with them everybody was getting along just fine. They were truly a band. My only mediation was in booting out Tony Bongiovi when David wanted to do his vocals!"

RICHARD E. AARON/REDFERNS)



"They were truly a band": Talking Heads on stage in New York, 1977

Exploring the sound of "some third thing" with St Vincent at the Roundhouse, London, 2013

MATT KENT/WIREIMAGE

to work – you guys might be able to pull this off, but it's pretty tricky!"

I read your introductory explanation for your choice of Meltdown performers, and was struck by your acknowledgement that it was financially impossible to have too many American acts.

Oh yeah. No surprise, there's a budget consideration. Thankfully, I'm not the one that has to juggle those figures – but we're in constant communication with the people at the Southbank. If I recommend someone, and they want to bring other players along with them, it could add to the budget to the point where, even if we sell out their night at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, it's not going to pay for the plane fares. I completely get that. If you have to take a bit of the profit from one act to cover the loss on another, that can be done. It's a whole Tetris thing, of shuffling blocks around until they fit.

I get the impression at a lot of live shows nowadays that it's all in the computer, that everything has to follow the lighting cues. There's very little room for the music to explore. I imagine your performances are a bit looser?

I've done both. Usually I'm a little bit looser, like with the Atomic Bomb! stuff – that's just get a groove going and don't let go. But the tour I did with St Vincent a year or two ago, we worked with a large brass section, and some of the songs, she wanted them to be on a click track – which I don't think people would have noticed, as the brass was live. She has a set-up where, when she's doing things with her guitar pedals, the computer triggers all the effects changes. She's an amazing guitar player, and this way [*snaps fingers*], right on cue, the sound of the guitar changes completely. But so much of the rest of it was live – the guitar playing, the drums, eight brass players. It was the poor drummer who suffered, having to play with a click.

Whose idea was the brass on that collaboration?

It was her idea. I thought it was brilliant. Not only because we both like that sound, but it took us to places that sounded like neither of our bands – although there are elements in both our works. It didn't sound like any band that I'd worked with; it meant it would sound like some third thing. Plus, with a group like that playing, it kind of mixes itself: if the arrangement is good, if you have the right numbers of people playing trombones and whatever, if the balance is right, it'll just acoustically come off the stage the way it's supposed to sound, as opposed to being created in the mix.

> **"The brass took us to places that sounded like neither of our bands"**
> **DAVID BYRNE**

What, for you, was the essential difference between the two album collaborations you did with Brian Eno?

The process was quite different. On the *Bush Of Ghosts* record it was like playing ping-pong: one person would create a track, then the other would respond to it, back and forth, back and forth, until we had enough stuff built up to say, "Oh, we can construct an arrangement out of this." And at some point, after working on it for a bit, we both decided that if either one of us sang on a song, people would assume that song was written by them, as people tend to do: they assume the voice is the authorial voice, and it's not always that way. So we thought, 'OK, let's make it neutral, let's use found voices, recordings or whatever – let's make that the theme, that neither of us sings, we use the voices as the vocals.'

Public Enemy's Hank Shocklee cited *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts* as one of the roots of hip-hop.

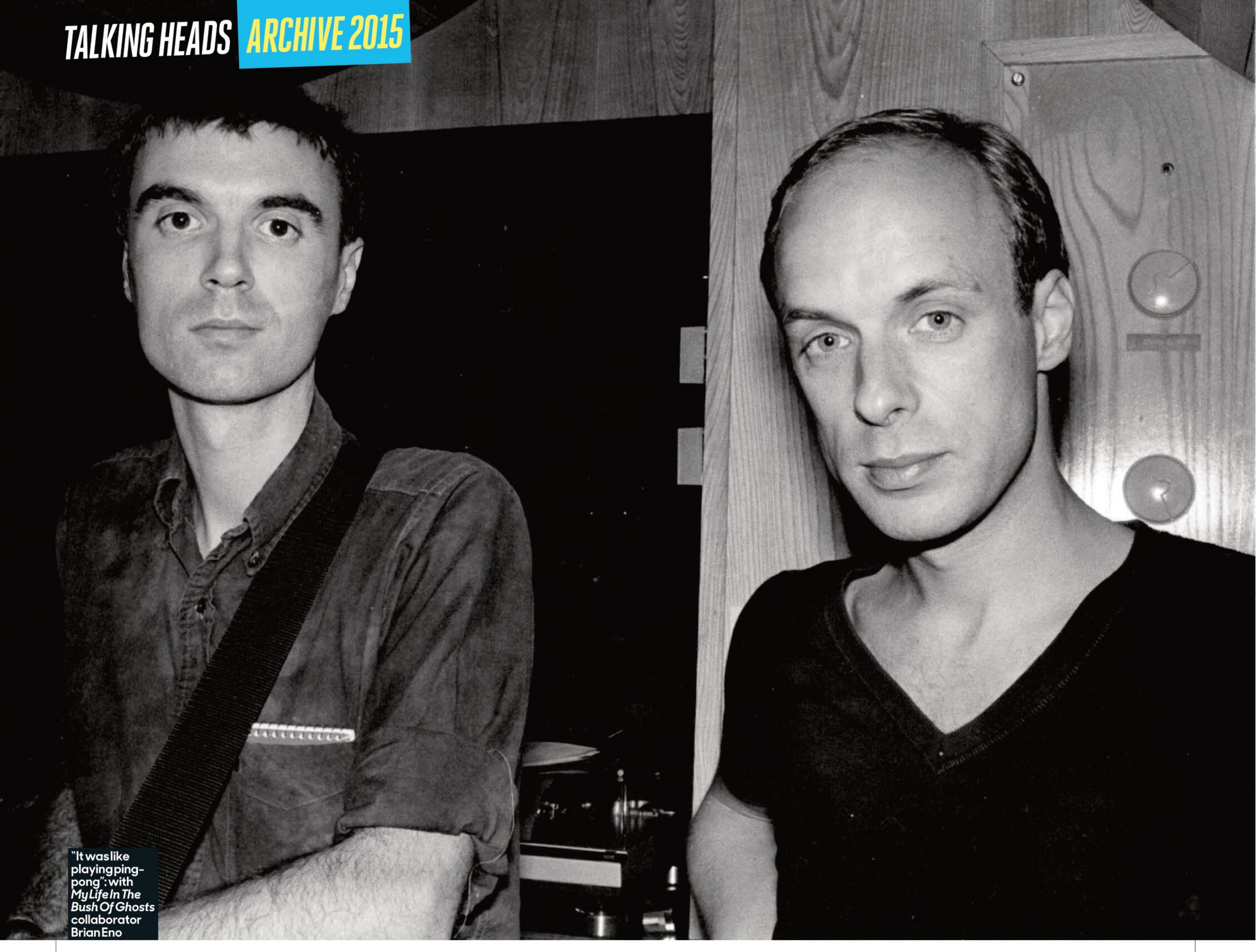
I know! Isn't that amazing!?

It also struck me, listening to the reissue recently, how much more difficult it must have been to do an album like that in the pre-sampler era.

Oh jeez, yeah! There was a lot of trial and error! You sometimes had to play an instrument as if you were a loop, the same part over and over. Which is fine – but as it's a little inaccurate,

In the "David Byrne Reading Lounge" at the Meltdown Festival launch, August 17, 2015

IAN GAVAN/GETTY IMAGES



"It was like playing ping-pong": with *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts* collaborator Brian Eno

ROBERTA BAYLEY/REDFERNS

you get this kind of slipperiness, which you don't get when everything is rigid perfection.

So if you had tapes of the vocal sources, were you editing them in as you went along?
Sometimes editing, sometimes flying them in, almost like a performance in the studio, where you press record, play them, stop it and see what you've got, and whether you can fix the ones that don't work so well.

How did that process differ from the later collaboration with Eno on *Everything That Happens Will Happen Today*?
It was very different. Brian said, "I have these tracks that I haven't been able to turn into songs." I said, "Pass a few to me, I'll try, and if you don't like it, no-one has to know; if you do like it, we keep going, and no-one has to know until we reach something that we like." That was more of a clean division of labour: he had these tracks, and I added words and melodies, and ended up singing them. But we seem to have escaped the authorial voice issue on that, too. It was plain that it was a collaboration, and that we were both writing the material, you could hear that. But it was different from the other record. Some of it was electronic, parts of it were kinda folky – they don't sound like folk songs, but when you look at the melody, or some of the words I wrote, they're like old-fashioned folk songs, in a way.

> "There was this temptation to really get into the pop machine, take it to the next level"
> DAVID BYRNE

Thematically, there seemed to be an apprehension about ageing: a lot of the songs were about dealing sympathetically with the ageing process.
Wow!? I wasn't aware of that! My parents have both passed on, and they were getting very old, and showing it, by that point, and that might have been on my mind. I don't know.

Were you a natural performer as a kid?
No, I don't think so. I started performing in high school when I was 16 or so, in pop bands with friends, or at folk clubs. I took to it, but at that point I was more driven to do it: it was almost like I felt so socially inept that this was the only way I could express myself, by getting up on a stage and doing something, often somebody else's song, but getting up on stage and asserting myself. And then retreating back into my shell the minute I'd step off stage. It was a curious kind of schizophrenic relationship. But if you don't feel comfortable communicating any other way, if there's an avenue open to you, you'll take it. Then over the years, that whole thing lessened. And now it's a pleasure to step on stage. There's no desperation. So there was some kind of weird edginess that got lost in that process, but something else was gained.

I understand you were rejected from your school choir because you were "off key and too withdrawn"...?
That's true. Most encouraging!

"Off key and too withdrawn" could be a definition for a certain kind of performer. Bob Dylan, for instance.
I guess that that kind of rejection pushes you into "I'm gonna show you!" territory.

When you ran a record label, was it a difficult gear-change from thinking as an artist – having to think more like a businessman, while looking out for other artists' interests?
Some of it is really different, but some of it is really familiar – because as an artist you understand what another artist's hopes and aspirations might be, and what they expect from a record label, how they'd like to be treated. You kind of get all that, sometimes in a way that other labels don't. The rest of it, some of the bumping up against the business contingencies, I would like to say that I can do it, it's not like I'm incompetent at it, but it's not where most of my skills lie. I love the part of

introducing the artist, and being an advocate for their music, but spending hours untangling knotty business problems – it's not much fun for me. I think my time might be more wisely spent writing some songs.

And at least you did some great archival work: the Os Mutantes record, for example.
Oh yes, they're amazing.

I've been re-reading your book *How Music Works*, and in parts of it you deal with the differences between performing live and working in the studio. Do you have a preference?
No. It used to be, in the early days, that I didn't like being in the studio at all. Talking Heads started as a live band, and I felt that what I heard on the recordings didn't sound like what I heard on stage. But later it was more balanced, and I realised there was a different type of creativity involved in each world. Then for a while there was a more typical record-business kind of thing, where you make a record, then tour behind it, which I would try and mix up as much as possible, for my own excitement and inspiration. That's been fun, but now I don't know if that cycle has as much meaning as before. For certain big pop artists, it does: when they release a record that they hope is going to sell tons of copies, the whole machine cranks up, the videos and the TV and the events and the tour; but for the rest, it's turning into something else, where it's an ongoing sense of work and performance, and I think some of my audience comes to my shows with almost no expectations! God bless them!

Pete Townshend once complained about how, following a year's touring, the other band members went off on holiday while he had to stay home and write the next album. Did you ever feel that way in Talking Heads?
Yeah, a little. I sometimes felt, like, they're all going out there partying, they're going to the beach, while I have to get my little pencil out and my Walkman recorder, recording ideas and working on stuff for our next record. But then, that's the work I love; it's not a horrible job by any means, so I can't complain. And as a songwriter, you're getting all the publishing money.

Did expectations change when things like "Burning Down The House" and "Road To Nowhere" were becoming popular?
Ah, yeah, but I didn't respond to all of them. The good side was that I could be more ambitious with the stage shows, and so there was a certain level of indulgence: people would say, "Oh, you want to try that? OK, let's try it." Whereas before it might have been either: "No, that costs too much" or "What gives you the right to think you can try that?" There was a bit more acceptance, and I could do other things, like directing the music videos. But there was also this temptation to really get into the pop machine and take it to the next level of pop arenas – and you start building up this huge infrastructure which you then have to write and record to support. I sensed losing some freedom there, as regards what I can do; and I like too much being able to ▶

Stop Making Sense: David Brent may have been taking notes...

"BYRNE WAS THE AUTEUR OF THAT SHOW..."

Director JONATHAN DEMME (1944–2017) on *Stop Making Sense*...

"IT was actually me who approached the band with the suggestion to film their performance, rather than the other way round. I'd seen their show at the Hollywood Bowl, and thought, 'There's a movie in this, this should be captured on film.' When I saw the Big Suit, I just went, 'Wow!' We met and discussed the project, and Warners came up with the money. David was pleased as it was an opportunity to record the performance in virtual monochrome. Usually, there's a lot of ambient light sources – exit signs, people opening and shutting doors – but we were able to control the environment to a high degree.

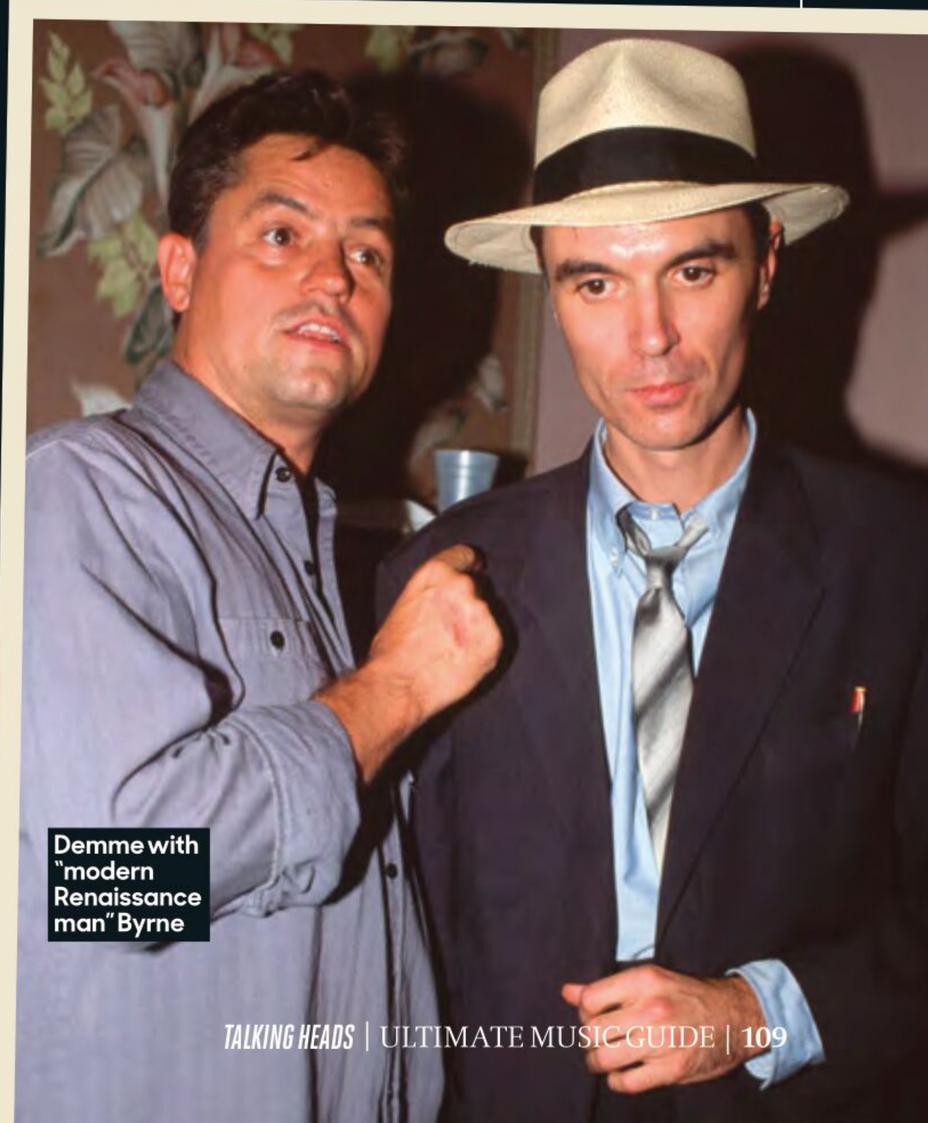
"Everything about the show – the sequencing, the way it builds, the staging – is entirely David's. Byrne was the auteur of that show, and deserves huge credit for it. I loved the way it built up gradually, especially the bits where the stage crew wheels on equipment as the band grows. We opted to ignore the audience – usually there are cutaways to audience reactions, but I thought, 'Who wants to look at the audience when you could be looking at these beautiful performers on stage?' And we didn't worry about the crew being in shot – they're an integral part of the show, after all.

"My director of photography, Jordan Cronenworth, also deserves credit – he did a brilliant job of lighting and filming it. Some of the sequences were planned ahead of time and worked out beautifully, but some of the best stuff was just things we'd caught in passing – there was so much happening on stage, such excitement and energy; we were very fortunate the way it worked out.

"When it came time to edit the movie, I wanted to get away from all that quick-cut editing prevalent at the time. I used long-held shots that focused on the performers' faces – which is what you want to see at a concert. As a result, it still looks great today, it hasn't aged. One thing that often gets overlooked is that these were the last shows Talking Heads ever did: they never toured together again after that, so we were fortunate enough to capture the band's final performances on film.

"I wasn't at all surprised when David made his own film, *True Stories*. He has so much inspiration, in so many different media: he truly is the modern Renaissance man!"

RICHARD E. AARON/REDFERNS; NICK ELGAR/CORBIS/VCG VIA GETTY IMAGES



Demme with "modern Renaissance man" Byrne

Performing 'poperetta' *Here Lies Love*, based on the life of Imelda Marcos (inset) at Carnegie Hall NYC, February 3, 2007, with Joan Almedilla

do all of these different sorts of things.

You were part of the initial MTV roster, through those videos. Presumably that played a major part in disseminating your work?
Yes. Though there were some songs that were perceived to be hits that weren't getting played on the radio, because people were seeing the videos. It was a time when MTV was desperate for material, and they played videos 24/7, so they needed stuff to fill up the time. So as fast as you could make stuff, they'd put it on.

You changed tack completely with *Remain In Light*, particularly in having no chord changes. Where did the idea come from?
From ...*Bush Of Ghosts*. They came out in reverse order, as we had to clear a lot of voice recordings on that: it was done before *Remain In Light*, but came out after. So Brian and I learned that technique, and had a practice run with *Bush Of Ghosts*, then we realised, "Oh look, we can do songs this way, why not bring the rest of the band into the process and use it to do actual songs?" Not that the *Bush Of Ghosts* things weren't songs...

There was a fairly heavy Afrobeat flavour to parts of *Remain In Light*. Was that one of your first non-western influences?
Yeah, I was hearing some of that material, whether from Kenya, Nigeria or South Africa – Fela, and some pop groups – although there was no way to find out that much about them. But there was a sense that here were people taking elements – guitars, bass, drums, whatever – that you were totally familiar with, the vocabulary being used, but they were organising it in a different way, so that it seemed like, 'Wow, we don't have to imitate them, but there's more than one way to skin a cat'.

The *Big Love: Hymnal* album, with its "fake Mormon hymns", was like a different, homegrown kind of Ethnological Forgery.
In a way, yeah. I was asked to do a score for this HBO series, and I had this odd idea to give these characters spiritual underpinning, because the odd stuff you're seeing – the polygamy, and this guy jumping from house to house because he has a wife in each – to them has a spiritual justification. I thought that by having the music reflect that underpinning, as odd as what you're seeing is, to them it all makes sense, there's something holding it all together. It didn't entirely work, but I managed to get some of that in there.

I thought it was interesting in offering almost an overview of American classical music, with elements of Ives and Copland and minimalism in there.
Why, thank you.

You've done a lot of theatre work, with the likes of Robert Wilson. How do those kinds of collaborations work? Is it their theatrical ideas that you have to align with?
It depends. They're very different. With Bob Wilson there was one piece called *The Knee Plays*, a series of short things, where – unusual for Bob – he had a kind of story; so my wife at the time and I made a kind of structure and imagined a way to tell the story silently, then I wrote this music with a narration to run parallel with it. Another one I did with Bob was called *The Forest*. Bob said, "There's money to be made in Germany for something theatrical." I said, "What if we do the Gilgamesh story, which is the oldest story known to man, and re-set it during the Industrial Revolution in Germany, because during that period the same questions – man versus nature, the city versus the country, all those questions get raised anew, and we can reset it that way." He agreed, but of course Bob being Bob, a story is just an inspiration for him, he doesn't feel like he has to adhere to a narrative or anything. He'll stick with it, but it's more of an underpinning than something in the forefront for the audience. Which is a fun way to work.

How did *Here Lies Love*, the musical collaboration with Norman Cook about Imelda Marcos, come about? What was the attraction of Imelda?
At first, it might have just been this outrageous person who lives in this bubble-world, and loves going to clubs – there's a connection between the hedonistic dance-club vibe and someone being as powerful as she and her husband were. That was a nice start to get you into that world, then I discovered there was a lot more going on – a relationship that just fell into my lap, the main opposition to her husband, Aquino, who was assassinated when he returned to the Philippines, she dated him when they were young, so there was this other parallel thread going with him: she got him out of prison, and he was sent into exile. And it all ended with this peaceful revolution, the precursor of those in Egypt and other places; though none of them end up quite as hoped.

> "Rather than ordering people to 'Do this!', I'd talk with them about it"
> DAVID BYRNE

How do you go about developing a musical like that?
It evolved in stages: I had the songs written, but I could never get support to do it theatrically – I always wanted it be done in a disco. And I wanted it to be all songs and no dialogue, so you couldn't have someone come on and say, "I'm such-and-such." The director Alex Timbers is great at the non-verbal narrative, where you understand the relationships between characters by their positions on stage, or clothing. It ran at the National last year, and now I've written another one. It'll take time, but I'm onto a second draft.

HIROYUKI ITO/GETTY IMAGES; BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

Any clues about a theme?
It's another historical woman, where there's a lot of information in the historical record. Which is good for me: I'm not making this story up – it's exactly what was said, on the record.

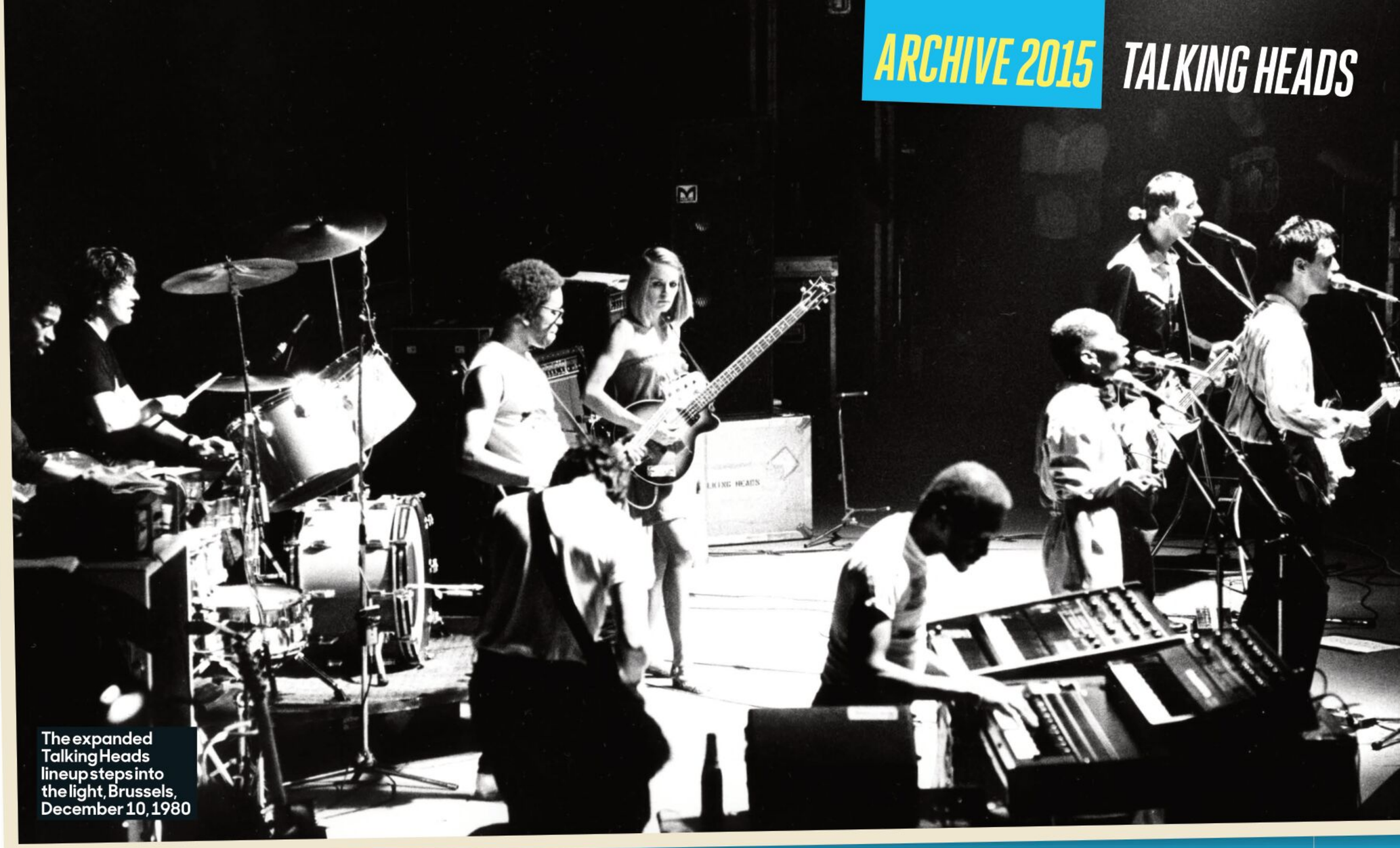
You realise that Eva Perón's been done?
Yes, that's been done, that's been done. The Imelda thing was compared to that, but the feeling was very different.

You've worked on a lot of narratives, notably your film, *True Stories*. What's the main difference between working on an album and a film – it's a much more collaborative process, presumably?
Yes, it is. As a musician, I started to become more comfortable... not being bossy as such, but in making my intentions clear. Rather than ordering people to "Do this!", I'd talk with them about it so they'd understand – and they end up helping you achieve what you want. It's vastly more complicated, but super fun to do.

I was intrigued to learn that Windows used a sample of yours as part of their operating system.
Oh yeah! One year, their new operating system included an audio/video player, and they used a song I'd done ["Like Humans Do", from 2001's *Look Into The Eyeball*] as a demo of how their audio player worked – so that when you opened up the player, there was something in there already. I thought, 'This will be a clever way to get a song from my new record to millions of people, to create awareness of the new recording.' It didn't really have that effect!

New York seems very amenable to creativity. Do you think you might have developed in a different way if you'd lived in Los Angeles?
I did try living in Los Angeles for a time in the mid-to-late '80s, at the time I was making that film, and obviously a lot of the producers and technical people are based in LA, and they're the best in their field. But I found that when you weren't actively involved in something there, you spent so many hours in your car, just going from place to place, and you think, 'Where are the years going here?'

I remember that line you wrote about London being "a small city", and I thought, Jesus, has he ever tried to get across it in rush hour?
Oh yeah, I get that! I think I meant that it was made up of lots of small villages, and people sometimes never ventured out of their little village. ▲


The expanded Talking Heads lineup steps into the light, Brussels, December 10, 1980

"DAVID REQUESTED OUR PRESENCE..."

BERNIE WORRELL remembers bringing the funk to Talking Heads

"I FIRST met Talking Heads sometime back in the early '80s. It was them that made contact with me. Jerry Harrison called me and asked if I'd be interested in joining them. I didn't know who they were! I didn't follow new wave. But we met up at a studio and jammed, and we enjoyed it, so I joined up.

"I'd been with P-Funk about 10 years, and I think Talking Heads modelled their larger lineup around ours; they told me they used to sneak into our shows, they were all fans of P-Funk. They took the concept of multi-rhythms, integrated it, got the rhythm thing more energetic, got more people involved. Jerry didn't play funk – that's what they wanted, the black rhythms. So I brought my feel into things, like the clavinet intro to 'Life During Wartime', and I'd suggest things they could do on guitars. I'd been musical director of P-Funk for years, so it was good to be able to sit back and just play.

"Nona Hendryx joined up too, and I brought in Lynn Mabry from the Brides Of Funkenstein, we made it a party! Talking Heads were a bit stiff when they started, they admitted it. That's why we injected the brotherhood. It became a unique combination of David's quirkiness – he's a conceptualist, like George Clinton – and the rhythms.

"I played with them for about four years, through the *Stop Making Sense* period. I was on the live album *The Name Of This Band...*, and I also played on *Speaking In Tongues*. I put my own flavour on 'This Must Be The Place (Naive Melody)'; and everybody loved what I added to 'Making Flippy Floppy', one of the synth or clavinet lines. While writing and composing, coming up with material, we'd jam, but not on stage; when we played live it was already a piece, the solos were all worked out.

"When Talking Heads stopped working together, I stayed in touch with the individual members, and I played on two or three things that Chris and Tina did – I seem to remember playing 'Soul Train' with the Tom Tom Club. Then when they reunited for the final one-off performance at their induction into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame – I had already been inducted with P-Funk – David requested the presence of Steve Scales and I. Because they couldn't have done 'Burning Down The House' without us!

"There was some friction there, I could sense it, but I tried to stay out of it, as I've seen that before, with P-Funk and others. But the friction was already there before they expanded the group, I suspect. Each of the others, Chris, Tina and Jerry, would come and ask me to talk to David, and I didn't want to get involved, as I knew he wouldn't change his mind; but I tried all the same. It's a shame, but that's part of the business."

Bernie Worrell (in fur coat) with Talking Heads at the Kiyomizu Temple in Kyoto, Japan, February 2, 1981

GIEKNAEPS/GETTY IMAGES; KOHHASEBE/SHINKOMUSIC/GETTY IMAGES

"It was about making your mark in music history..."

From the Frantz/Weymouth home in Connecticut, CHRIS FRANTZ recalls the "new wave" beginnings, improvised middle and laconic end of Talking Heads. Up for discussion: friendship with David Byrne, the diplomatic genius of Tina Weymouth, and the enduring power of *Remain In Light*. "We decided to go to Compass Point and improvise," Frantz tells MARK BEAUMONT. "Forty years later, it still sounds hip..."

"I DON'T DOUBT that the chicken blood helped!" Chris Frantz chuckles down the phone line from he and Tina Weymouth's home in Connecticut, recalling how the band arrived at Compass Point studios in the Bahamas in 1978 to start recording the first of three breakthrough albums they'd make there with Brian Eno, to be told that a witch doctor had performed a ritual of protection and good fortune along the studio border.

Such colourful details flesh out his recent memoir *Remain In Love*, a story as much about he and Weymouth's idyllic new wave love affair as Talking Heads' journey from CBGB's collegiate sore thumbs to dislocated figureheads of pan-cultural art pop. Within are tales of lunching with Warhol and wrangling with Lou; of destroying churches with the Ramones and living out *Pulp Fiction* with The Rolling Stones. And, of course, the divisions and neuroses that ultimately wrecked the Heads: as the band's profile grows, so does David Byrne's distance from and dominion over the group and its music.

It's a travelogue trip on a road to nowhere with spectacular views, best penned while there was still gas in the tank. "I've been thinking about writing it for a very long time," Chris says, "and when I reached age 67 I thought, 'Better get a move on, man!' Our friends are dropping like flies."

The book concentrates heavily on the early days of Talking Heads. Was that a particularly magical time? "It was, for me. For a lot of people the mid-to-late '70s were very exciting and romantic and also artistically very compelling. It was a very heady time, very exuberant... From the first time we played 'Psycho Killer' live in front of an audience of friends at the Rhode Island School Of Design, it was clear that that song really stood out as something that people really got excited about. So all the indicators were that we should really do more of this. We moved to New York because we felt like New York was the centre of the cultural universe at that time. We were very fortunate that we did, because I don't think Talking Heads would've really happened had we stayed in Providence or been in some other town like Chicago."

> "There were indications that David had issues with any type of credits"
> CHRIS FRANTZ

You write that Byrne initially took full credit for "Warning Sign", which you contributed lyrics to. Did that ring alarm bells for the future? "There were very definitely indications that he had issues with that type of thing, any type of credits, but we always thought that he'd grow out of it, if we were nice to him he'd be nice to us. We were perhaps a little naive that way, but in any case we did great work together. Anybody who's been in a band will tell you that these types of problems occur. It seems like in our band we had the same recurring problem, it happened again and again, but the end result was so good that it made it worthwhile."

When you spent your early rehearsals trying to find your own sound, what were you looking for? "A sound that was not the predictable rock'n'roll sound based on blues and Chuck Berry licks. We were going for something that we felt was more unique unto ourselves. In art school one thing we were schooled about was that it's fine to be inspired or influenced by those who've come before you, but you always have to add something that's unique unto yourself to the mix. Otherwise you're just a copycat."

Did you take anything from what was happening at CBGB's or did you bring something entirely different to it? "What we loved about the other bands at CBGB's was they were all very different from one another but the one thing they had in common was a sense of artistic urgency. I felt like everyone had a real ▶

TINA WEYMOUTH, JOE STEVENS

Remain in trim: Talking Heads hit the exercise studio, 1977

Avoiding the predictable: Talking Heads perform at UC Berkeley, California, September 18, 1978

RICHARD MCCAFFREY/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

need for creative expression. These people were really driven. Patti Smith, Dee Dee Ramone, Richard Lloyd and Tom Verlaine – every member of those bands was driven to find a position of historical importance. It wasn't just about having a hit record or a hefty bank account, and Talking Heads felt very strongly about this; it was about making your mark in music history... CBGB's was like an incubator where the bands could develop and grow and hone their stagecraft and learn how to put on a good show. After that it became our springboard out into the rest of the world."

You claim in the book that you were post-punk before there was even punk... "It's true. We were also alternative before there was a thing called 'alternative'. New wave was an expression referring to French cinema, but Seymour Stein used it to describe Talking Heads and differentiate us from so-called punk music. Here in America, commercial radio programmers refused to play punk music. They were like, 'We don't play punk music, we only play good music.' Seymour turned around to them and said, 'But Talking Heads, they're not punk, they're new wave.' So the radio programmer would say, 'Oh, they're new wave? Oh, I guess we could play new wave...' It was a marketing handle that became very useful to us."

It sounds like there were some hairy moments while you, Tina and David were living in a loft in the Bowery. "One night we were sitting around in our loft watching TV and all of a sudden we were covered by powdered glass. We didn't hear the gunshot, but when the bullet went through the glass window and sprayed glass all over us we thought, 'Uh-oh, we'd better put our heads down.'"

What were your highlights of your first European tour with the Ramones? "In Brussels, in an old deconsecrated church, they'd been having performances there for many years... It was pretty run down and the kids pogoed right through the floor!"

> **"David is a very charismatic person. I guess he still is – I don't really see him any more"**
> CHRIS FRANTZ

As the band got bigger, David seemed to get more distant from the rest of you – why was that? "David was the type of person who liked to distance himself from people who really knew him, and we really knew David. It wasn't just Tina and myself and Jerry, it was all his old friends. It was like suddenly he was not really their friend any more. I don't know why that was, but I think it was because we really knew him. I remember one day asking our manager, Gary Kurfirst, who was a great manager, 'Did I ever do anything to David that would cause him to treat us this way?' and our manager just looked at me and said, 'You're the best friend he ever had.' So it's not something that makes sense logically; it's deeper than that and more complicated."

With the arrival of the African influence of "I Zimbra" and *Remain In Light*, was there a sense of being at the forefront of a pan-cultural movement? "We were hoping that we would break some new ground, that was the whole idea, and I think we succeeded at that. We in Talking Heads had been listening to African music since our college days. It started with Fela and then Manu Dibango, Chief Commander Ebenezer Obey and King Sunny Adé, we just dug that stuff. We loved to have good parties, and African music is the best for good parties."

With Blondie indulging in disco and rap, why do you think the new wave was so much more culturally exploratory than punk? "Not everybody went that way. Down at CBGB's many of the bands disdained anything that was remotely 'black' unless it was Jimi Hendrix or Sly And The Family Stone."

Is Brian Eno as much of a genius as we're led to believe? "Brian Eno is something of a genius producer, yes. He does have a real talent for getting a band to raise the bar and do something more artistically challenging and interesting than whatever they had done before. We owe a debt of gratitude to Brian for the work he did with us, but likewise he owes a debt of gratitude to us in Talking Heads because I think we really made him look good."

R*EMAIN IN Light* was a pivotal record in terms of band dynamic as much as its sound. Did you enter a more difficult phase internally around then? "This was around that period where David started to want to distance himself from the rest of the band

Tom Tom Club on a joint ticket with The Go-Go's at Chastain Park Amphitheater, Atlanta, Georgia, August 9, 2011

and we had to kind of lure him back, which we successfully did. It was Tina's idea – David and Brian had been out in San Francisco, they were working on that record *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts*. For one reason or another they were not talking to each other at this point in time, so David was not only distancing himself from the band but also from Brian Eno.

"It was time for Talking Heads to make another record and Tina very cleverly got on the phone and called up Brian and said, 'Chris, Jerry and I are having a jam session, we'd love for you to join us'... He came over and we started jamming and we were having a very good time. Then Tina got on the phone to David and said, 'Oh David, guess what, Chris and Jerry and I are having this great jam session with Brian Eno over here at our loft – why don't you come over and join us?' In about half an hour's time he was joining us with his guitar... We were encouraged, and most importantly David was encouraged, that there was still some chemistry here. So we decided to go down to Compass Point and just improvise [*Remain In Light*]. It's the 40th anniversary – 40 years and it still sounds hip!"

When your individual names were taken off the songwriting credits on the sleeve for *Remain In Light*, was that when you realised that your contributions were being undervalued? "It became clear to us that David and Brian were trying to more or less take the credit for what the group had done... [*but*] in order to keep the band and that super artistic momentum going we just had to roll with it. We kept hoping that David would one day understand that the rest of the band was important also."

Was the success of Tom Tom Club a vindication? "Yes, Tom Tom Club was a much-needed shot in the arm for Tina and I, both psychologically and financially. That first album was just like magic."

Did David resent that? "I don't think David was too excited about it. [*He*] was probably shocked because our little Tom Tom Club album sold in the millions and Talking Heads had never done that. Certainly David Byrne's *Catherine Wheel* had never done that, not even close. But sales are not the most important thing; what's most important to us is historical significance, and that first Tom Tom Club is highly influential and something I'll always be really proud of."

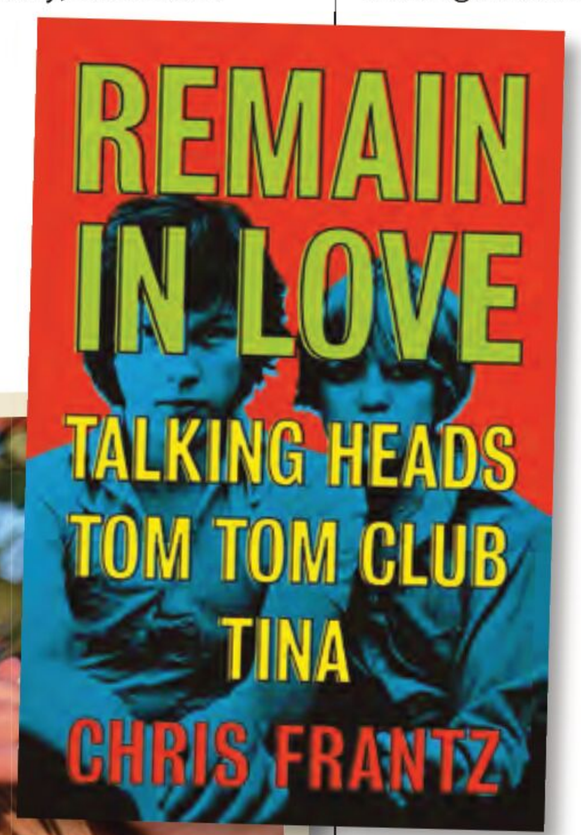
How did the two bands relate for you – did you ever consider concentrating on Tom Tom Club instead? "No, Tina and I always thought of Talking Heads as our first baby, or another analogy might be the mothership. We didn't think of it as something we would ever want to leave or be unfair to."

You claim it was hard work keeping Talking Heads together during the '80s. Did David become more controlling? "The record company and the media in general gave him the permission. David is a very compelling and charismatic person – at least he used to be. I guess he still is; I don't really see him any more. But on stage he's a very strong and entertaining performer. He will do whatever it takes to command the audience's attention. If it takes doing a silly dance he'll do it, if it takes going 'blblblbllbaaagh' in the middle of a song, he'll do that. He'll stop at nothing to be the centre of attention. He's not Randy Newman!"

The book describes riotous scenes around later European tours. What were the scariest moments? "In Milan, where we were playing outdoors and Tina was pregnant at the time, the audience was throwing Molotov cocktails at the police because they thought that the ticket price was too high. The ticket price was something like 25 cents! It was sponsored by the Communist party!"

You also recall accidentally snorting a line of heroin offered to you by one of The Rolling Stones thinking it was cocaine. Was that the extent of Talking Heads' drug scandals? "We did our share of drugs. One of The Rolling Stones came backstage just before we were to go on and said, 'Wanna do a line?' and I said, 'Yeah!' My mistake, I didn't know it would be the other thing. We were very clean for a long time, we would have a few beers or something, but when it came to the harder drugs none of us ever did heroin or anything like that. But cocaine was a stylish thing to do and it really did keep you going when you were tired or exhausted. Then later on it takes its toll. We all thought, 'Cocaine is not addictive, isn't that great', but it is kinda addictive so I had some problems with that, but thanks to Tina's guidance and ultimatum and with the help of my manager I was able to get into a programme where I detoxed, got out of that and I haven't done it since. This was in the mid-'80s. When it became a real problem was when we stopped touring and then I had a lot of free time on my hands, and that's not good."

Frantz and Weymouth in the Bahamas recording the second Tom Tom Club album, *Close To The Bone*, February 1983



What are your feelings about the way the band split? "I always like to say that David sneaked out of the band. We never had any sit-down meeting where we agreed to split. David just one day, after one of his solo albums was released, announced in the *Los Angeles Times* that the band had broken up "or whatever you want to call it", I think is what he said. We found out about this because we got a call from the fact-checker of the *Los Angeles Times*: 'Is it true that the band has broken up?' Of course, that was news to us. So that wasn't very nice, but even then we kept thinking, 'One day David will wake up and realise that Talking Heads is a worthwhile endeavour.' I'm still waiting, but no longer holding my breath." ▲

Chris Frantz's memoir ***Remain In Love*** *is in all good bookshops now*

CHRIS MCKAY/WIREIMAGE, LYNN GOLDSMITH/CORBIS/VCG VIA GETTY IMAGES

COMPILATIONS & LIVES

RELEASED: 1992–2019

The Talking Heads comps and the Byrne solo/Tom Tom Club live albums. BY PETER WATTS

AS YOU might hope for a band that tried just about everything at least once in their career, there is a Talking Heads compilation for almost every occasion. Casual fans can dip into **Once In A Lifetime: The Best Of Talking Heads** EMI, 1992 ★★★★, a fine single-disc compilation from 1992 that featured 14 tracks containing the hits plus "Lifetime Piling Up", or you could go for **The Best Of Talking Heads** WARNER, 2004 ★★★★, which came out just over a decade later and had 18 tracks. There's not unexpected overlap between the two and while *The Best Of...* has more music, *Once In A Lifetime* has a better cover, a couple of songs from *Stop Making Sense* plus the very good "Sax And Violins" from the soundtrack to Wim Wenders' *Until The End Of The World*. In 2011, **Essential Talking Heads** EMI, 2011 ★★★★ hit the market; its main selling factor is that the tracks have been remastered and it will, of course, look peachy beside all the other EMI *Essential* collections on the CD rack.

Pick any of the above, but avoid a one-disc comp called **The Collection** EMI, 2007 ★★ that draws on material recorded for EMI between 1984 and 1988 (and sneaks in some earlier stuff, including "Psycho Killer" and "Burning Down The House", via *Stop Making Sense*), or **Same As It Ever Was** RHINO, 2009 ★★, which was produced for Starbucks and has a very silly cover.

Those who are seeking to go a little deeper into the catalogue also have choices to make. **Sand In The Vaseline: Popular Favourites** EMI, 1992 ★★★★ came out at the same time as *Once In A Lifetime* and took advantage of its first-out-the-gate status to bring a very solid mix of classics and rarities. It included a couple of unreleased early demos ("Sugar On My Tongue", which started the album untricksily in 1975 and "I Want To Love") plus the non-album single "Love → Building On Fire" and the B-side to "Psycho Killer" ("I Wish You Wouldn't Say That"). There were also three unreleased studio outtakes that Byrne finished for the compilation, "Gangsters Of Love", "Love Piling Up" and "Popsicle". Add to that a healthy smattering of tracks from every album bar *The Name Of This Band Is...* and you can see why the compilation remains so popular among TH fans.

The immediate longform rival is **Once In A Lifetime** WARNER, 2003 ★★★★ which confusingly – but not unpredictably – shares a title with an earlier compilation. This 3CD box has packaging that is either incredible or irritating depending on your storage system and offers a fairly definitive overview of the band's career, picking between five and eight songs from every album – presumably to capitalise on the band's recent entry to The Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame. There are similar rarities to *Sand In The Vaseline*, plus additional outtake "In Asking Land", which was rewritten as "Carnival Eyes" for Byrne's 1989 solo album *Rei Momo*. There are also alternative versions of four songs – "Uh-Oh, Love Comes To Town", "New Feeling", "Cities", and an early mix of "Drugs" with Robert Fripp on guitar. Finally, there is the big box **Talking Heads** SIRE, WARNER, RHINO, 2005 ★★★★ – also known as *Brick* – which contains every studio album paired with a stack of bonus material. Interestingly conflicted about the digital era, it presents the music in two-sided dualdisc format (qu'est-ce que c'est?) but also includes a program which tries to prevent the listener from ripping the CD in their computer. Weird, but it's not the first time anyone's said that about this band.

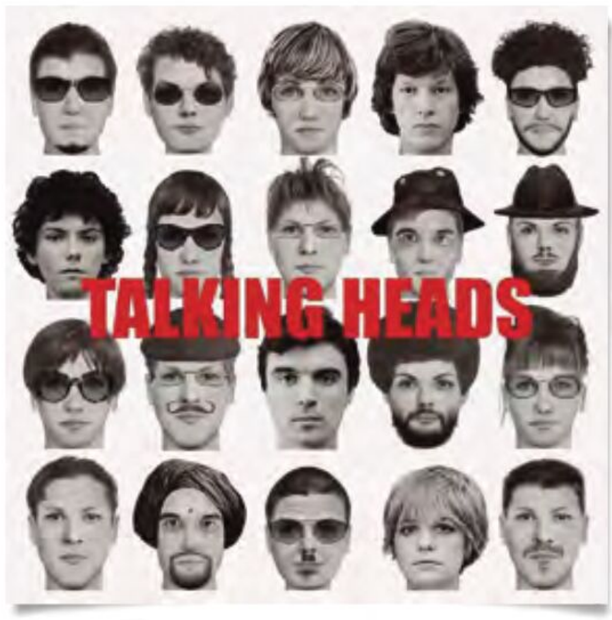
What if you want something you can't get anywhere else? Well, Talking Heads can do that too. There's the digital-only **Bonus Rarities And Outtakes** WARNER, 2006 ★★, which gathered up some real obscurities in a fairly haphazard manner but features at least one very good track in an alternative version ("The Lady Don't Mind") plus a kooky snatch of Byrne singing "These Boots Are Made For Walking". Lastly, **12x12 Original Remixes** EMI, 1999 ★★ – also released as *Remixed* – contains 12 12" remixes of tracks from the final three studio albums. You can probably live without it.

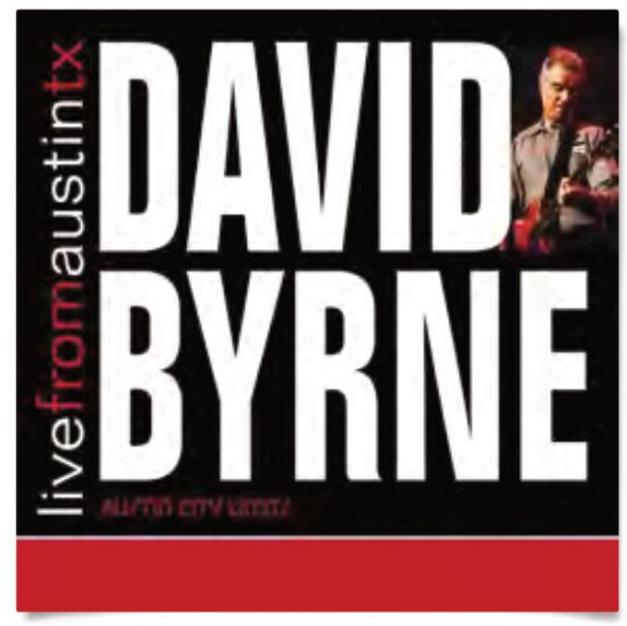
TALKING HEADS live albums are dealt with elsewhere, but David Byrne has released a handful of solo live recordings. **Live From Austin, TX** NEW WEST, 2007 ★★★★ was recorded for Austin City Limits in 2001 during the Look Into My Eyeball tour and featured Byrne's four-piece accompanied by Tosca, a Texan tango string quartet. Although this works better with his solo tracks, it adds a shine to some older numbers, particularly "Life During Wartime", bringing them into

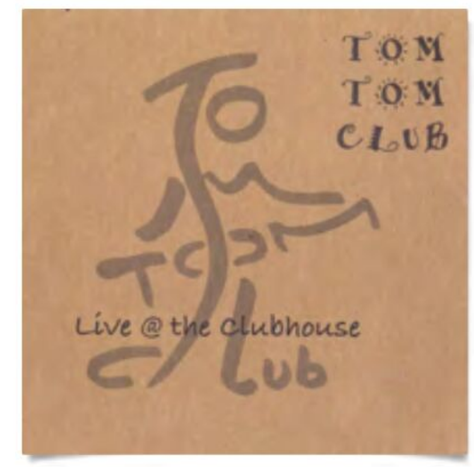
CRITICS' VERDICT

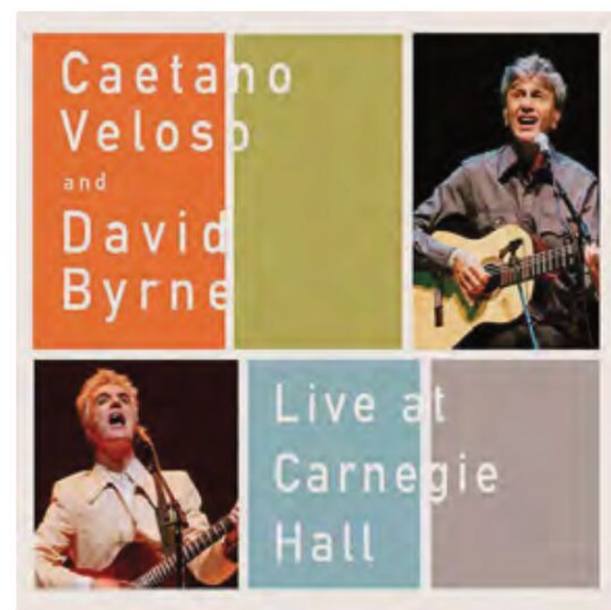
LIVE AT CARNEGIE HALL
"In this memorable acoustic show – a great double act – Caetano Veloso delivering hits like "Sampa" as gentle bossas is nothing new, but Byrne's rendition of Talking Heads classics like "Life During Wartime" to guitar, cello and percussion is a treat. The two men join seamlessly for Veloso's "Ile Aiye", clown amiably on the Heads' "Nothing But Flowers" and send a devoted audience home very happy."
NEIL SPENCER, UNCUT, MAY 2012

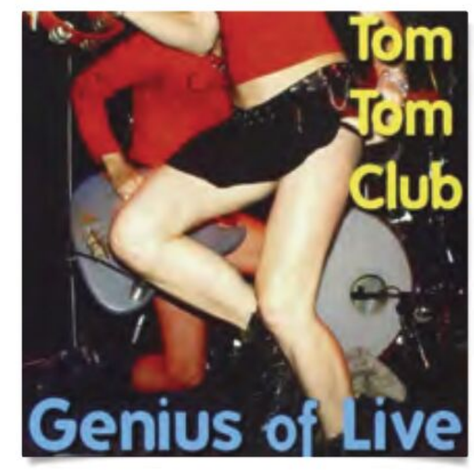
LIVE FROM AUSTIN TX
"Byrne's band deliver burbling funky-Afro support on the likes of "(Nothing But) Flowers" or "Once In A Lifetime", with Paul Frazier's rubbery basslines bouncing all over the mix."
ADAM SWEETING, UNCUT, FEB 2008

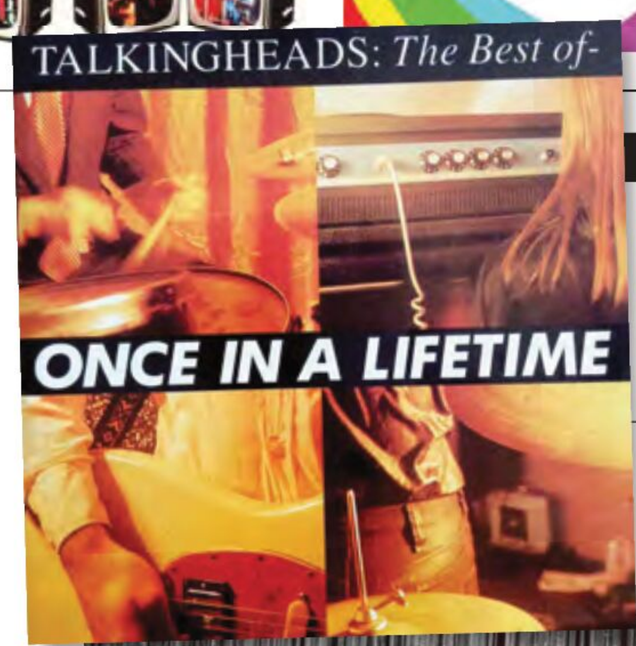


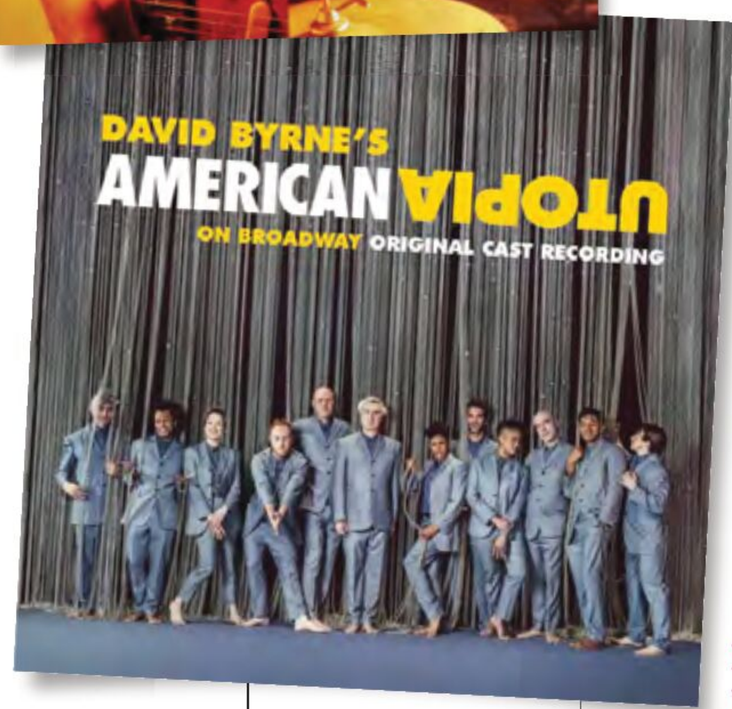












accordance with his contemporary solo releases. He finishes the set with a serene cover of Whitney's "I Wanna Dance With Somebody", not a trace of irony to be found – simply embracing a classic song.

The rather beautiful **Live At Carnegie Hall** NONESUCH, 2012 ★★★★ features Byrne working both solo and with Brazilian composer Caetano Veloso. This was Veleso's show. He was asked by Carnegie Hall to curate an evening and asked Byrne to join him. An acoustic and vulnerable affair, it is worth checking out for the stunning version of "(Nothing But) Flowers". Veloso's solo numbers add to the spellbinding mood.

THOSE SEEKING TO GO A LITTLE DEEPER INTO THE CATALOGUE HAVE CHOICES TO MAKE

As well as these two full-length albums, there are a couple of interesting EPs. Byrne and Eno's 2009 collaboration was captured on **Everything That Happens Will Happen On This Tour – David Byrne On Tour: Songs Of David Byrne and Brian Eno** TODO MUNDO, 2009 ★★★ – there's only four tracks but proceeds went to Amnesty – while the acclaimed recent solo tour turned up as **"... The Best Live Show Of All Time" – NME** NONESUCH, 2018 ★★★, a six-song EP recorded in Brooklyn that doesn't really do the event justice. Instead, go for **David Byrne's American Utopia On Broadway** NONESUCH, 2019 ★★★★ – it's not the same without the visual accompaniment (the film is coming out very soon so fear not) , but it's still a fabulous recording.

Byrne's old bandmates have also released a couple of live albums. **Live@ The Clubhouse** 2003 ★★★ was recorded in 2001 at Tom Tom Club's Connecticut studio in front of 50 guests. Featuring tracks from across their career (although not "Pleasure Of Love"), it's something like a greatest hits set and has top versions of "Genius Of Love" and "Wordy Rappinghood", plus covers of "Take Me To The River" (the only Talking Heads recording they touch) and a fabulous reworking of "You Sexy Thing" from their under-the-radar *Dark Sneak Love Action*. A fair bit scratchier is **Genius Of Live** NACIONEL RECORDS, 2010 ★, which has 12 tracks from *Live@The Clubhouse* and 11 remixes of "Genius Of Love", topping the cowpat with a truly atrocious cover. ▲

TALKING HEADS MISCELLANY

BURNING UP THE CHARTS

The complete TALKING HEADS singles discography

LOVE → BUILDING ON FIRE
SIRE, 1977
The baroque-pop debut never appeared on a studio album, but became a live favourite even for Jerry Harrison, who didn't play on the single.
Highest chart position: UK – ; US –

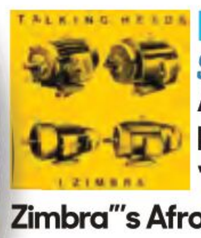
UH-OH, LOVE COMES TO TOWN
SIRE, 1977
Early world music influence crept into the quasi-reggae "Uh-Oh...", with steel drums providing the post-chorus riff of Byrne's love-addled limbo.
Highest chart position: UK – ; US –

PSYCHO KILLER
SIRE, 1977
Coinciding with the Son Of Sam murders, Talking Heads' first ever composition gave new wave its borderline-psychotic edge.
Highest chart position: UK – ; US 92

PULLED UP
SIRE, 1978
Demented hula pop on which Byrne is supported through life's pitfalls by daddy or drugs, depending on your reading.
Highest chart position: UK – ; US –

TAKE ME TO THE RIVER *SIRE, 1978*
One of three covers of the Al Green staple released in '78, the Heads' crank-pop version crafted a through-line from classic soul to punk.
Highest chart position: UK – ; US 26

LIFE DURING WARTIME
SIRE, 1979
New York's East Village portrayed as dystopian post-apocalyptic wasteland and the artist as guerrilla revolutionary. Surprisingly catchy, considering.
Highest chart position: UK – ; US 80



I ZIMBRA
SIRE, 1980
Adapting lyrics from Hugo Ball's Dadaist poem "Gadji Beri Bimba", "I Zimbra"'s Afrobeat rhythms pointed the way to the *...Light*.
Highest chart position: UK – ; US –

CITIES
SIRE, 1980
Byrne considers relocating to a dark and distant hamlet like, say, London, while his band's funk-punk backing drives him to the edge of distraction.
Highest chart position: UK – ; US –

CROSSEYED AND PAINLESS *SIRE, 1980*
"I Zimbra" has an identity crisis on a *Remain In Light* highline that became Talking Heads' biggest US dance chart hit.
Highest chart position: UK – ; US –

ONCE IN A LIFETIME
SIRE, 1981
TH let no more days go by without a UK Top 20 single, as Byrne's preacher-pop classic dismantled the American Dream to hypnotic effect.
Highest chart position: UK 14; US –

HOUSES IN MOTION
SIRE, 1981
Blaxploitation grooves met global textures on *Remain In Light*'s final single.
Highest chart position: UK 50; US –

LIFE DURING WARTIME (LIVE)
SIRE, 1982
Fear Of Music's funk-pop peak took on an even more groove-laden feel in its live incarnation culled from *The Name Of This Band....*
Highest chart position: UK – ; US –

JOE STEVENS

BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE *SIRE, 1983*

A P-Funk audience chant inspired the Heads' highest-charting US single, arguably one of the most successful songs about insurance fraud ever released.

Highest chart position: UK – ; US 9

SLIPPERY PEOPLE (REMIX) *SIRE, 1983*

John "Jellybean" Benitez's remix of "Slippery People" left the core song unharmed but let the post-chorus drift off into hallucinogenic house territories.

Highest chart position: UK – ; US –

THIS MUST BE THE PLACE (NAÏVE MELODY) *SIRE, 1983*

Byrne would claim this as his first twist-free love song; the naivety of the title was achieved by the band swapping instruments.

Highest chart position: UK 51; US 62

SLIPPERY PEOPLE (LIVE) *SIRE, 1984*

The bristling energy of *Stop Making Sense* enlivened some of *Speaking In Tongues*' more stilted moments, evinced by this fabulous live liberation.

Highest chart position: UK 68; US –

GIRLFRIEND IS BETTER (LIVE) *SIRE, 1984*

Infidelity remorse rarely sounded as funky as this second *Stop Making Sense* cut.

Highest chart position: UK 99; US –

THE LADY DON'T MIND *SIRE, 1985*

Embracing '80s brass, *Little Creatures* was trailed with a first single that belied the album's intellectual pop vibrancy.

Highest chart position: UK 81; US –

ROAD TO NOWHERE *SIRE, 1985*

A "joyful look at doom" that rode its locomotive rhythm and fatalistic worldview to the heart of American alt-pop.

Highest chart position: UK 6; US –

AND SHE WAS *SIRE, 1985*

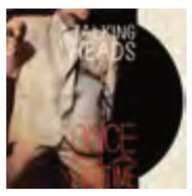
The tale of a "blissed-out hippie chick" floating above Baltimore on acid, which fittingly helped *Little Creatures* become Talking Heads' highest-flying album.

Highest chart position: UK 17; US 54

STAY UP LATE *SIRE, 1985*

Byrne gets broody on *Little Creatures*' breezy alt-rock ode to baby-making.

Highest chart position: UK – ; US –



ONCE IN A LIFETIME (LIVE) *SIRE, 1985*

For casual fans, *Stop Making Sense* became a de facto greatest hits, with "Once In A Lifetime" benefiting from a new lease of life with a live reissue.

Highest chart position: UK – ; US 91

WILD WILD LIFE *SIRE, 1986*

Kicking off his *True Stories* project with a bar-rock anthem of American excess – and TH's last US Top 40 single – Byrne's natural cinematic knack stretched as far as casting an unknown Steve Buscemi in the video.

Highest chart position: UK 43; US 25

LOVE FOR SALE *SIRE, 1986*

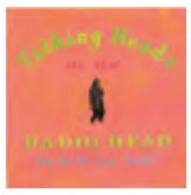
Compiling ad slogans into a glam-rock comment on materialism made for compulsive songwriting, but sadly not commercial gold.

Highest chart position: UK – ; US –

PUZZLIN' EVIDENCE *SIRE, 1986*

Performed by a conspiracy-theorist preacher exposing the secret powers of the Trilateral Commission in the movie, gospel workout "Puzzlin' Evidence" was an early example of red pill rock.

Highest chart position: UK – ; US –



RADIO HEAD *SIRE, 1987*

The story of a man capable of hearing radio and brain waves in his head was reportedly inspired by the abilities of *True Stories* actor Stephen Tobolowsky. In turn, the reggae-pop song inspired the name of a British rock band.

Highest chart position: UK 52; US –

BLIND *WARNER BROS, 1988*

No longer merely emulating Al Green, *Naked*'s lead single found Byrne fully possessed by classic soul, babbling impressionist verses of broken democracies, terrorist and hungry dogs.

Highest chart position: UK 59; US –

(NOTHING BUT) FLOWERS *WARNER BROS, 1988*

An Afrobeat sequel to Joni Mitchell's "Big Yellow Taxi" in which, post capitalist meltdown, nature has reclaimed the modern world and all its conveniences. Features Johnny Marr and Kirsty McColl.

Highest chart position: UK 79; US –

SAX AND VIOLINS *WARNER BROS, 1991*

A *Naked* offcut repurposed as a synthetic vision of music from the year 2000 for Wim Wenders' *Until The End Of The World*, "Sax And Violins" was the Heads' final release before their disbandment.

Highest chart position: UK – ; US –

LIFETIME PILING UP *WARNER BROS, 1992*

A brighter *Naked* outtake, released to promote the *Sand In The Vaseline: Popular Favourites* compilation.

Highest chart position: UK 50; US –

MARK BEAUMONT

QU'EST-CE QUE C'EST?

The French promos, and vacuum-packed pop art that are your Talking Heads must-haves

A GENERALLY chart-friendly band – at a time when these things meant something – Talking Heads are not in the front rank of collectable artists. Even in 2020, which has seen a serious spike in demand for all things vinyl, you can source excellent UK copies of original albums for around the £20 mark, often much less. Early singles or limited editions – so often the very currency of collectability – are desirable, but not stupidly expensive.

Examples: the first UK single "Love → Building On Fire", in moody monochrome picture sleeve, will cost around £20 in excellent condition. 1978's double 7" pack of "Take Me To The River", with its foldout Peter Frame-penned Talking Heads family tree, looks proper rare. But it can be yours for just £15 or so. And *qu'est-ce que c'est*, that top-shelf item at €30? It's the French issue of "Psycho Killer" in a rather off-brand surrealist picture sleeve.

Serious collectors like to source the best-condition, as-new, "time-machine" copies. And you only really get that when an item is still sealed. A shrink-wrapped US version of More Songs About Buildings And Food, with all-important 'hype sticker', broke $100 in 2019 – with 26 different bidders driving the price up. We've seen sealed versions of the debut album make similar amounts. A sealed original Fear Of Music, with its tactile tyre-track sleeve utterly un-road-tested, has sold for $220+.

Indeed, the most famous Heads collectable of all is defined by its artwork and packaging. That would be the clear vinyl issue of Speaking In Tongues, from 1983. Limited to 50,000 copies in each of North America and Europe, the artwork was designed by avant-garde legend Robert Rauschenberg. The item description – a vacuum-sealed transparent plastic case, with three transparent collages, one per primary colour – doesn't really do justice to the stunning visual effect.

As is often the case with high-concept vinyl, this was a nightmare to bring to production. The story goes that Jerry Harrison himself spent months trying to track down a company with the ability to vacu-form a record, ultimately alighting on a business whose speciality was contract packaging hot dogs for Oscar Meyer. This Speaking In Tongues retailed at $12.98 – a bargain for a Rauschenberg. Today, still sealed in its hot-dog tomb, but yellowed perhaps with age, it will set you back at least $100. We've seen the best copies sell for treble that. A rarer, signed deluxe version – only ever available from art galleries – will be $500 or thereabouts.

Other, later items mirror

wider trends in collecting. '90s vinyl, pressed in tiny quantities at a time when the format was apparently coughing its last, is hugely desirable. Which is why '92 greatest hits set Sand In The Vaseline, on triple vinyl, is conservatively valued at £80-£100. Limited-edition retrospectives and remasters can hold their value well. The back-catalogue-as-art installation boxset Brick, from 2005, will set you back around £350. This is a beautiful presentation of eight studio albums, expanded and remastered as two-sided DualDiscs, with unreleased cuts, art prints and other collector catnip on board. As one observer notes on collector forum Discogs.com: "This is as good as it gets for audio media". *MARK BENTLEY*

ACT CASUAL

The JERRY HARRISON discography

ALBUMS

JERRY HARRISON
The Red And The Black
SIRE, 1981

If the Tom Tom Club's debut album blew the lid off the depth of talent lurking in the backdrop of Talking Heads, Jerry Harrison's solo debut – also released during the post-*Remain In Light* semi-hiatus – added fuel to the fire. It too expanded on the cultural adventures of *...Light*, with the polyrhythms, Eno ambiences, spoken-word verses, art samples and arena soul vibe of tracks like "Things Fall Apart", "Slink" and "Worlds In Collision" acting as something of a bridge between Talking Heads' art-pop beginnings and their '80s largesse.
Highest chart position: UK – ; US –

JERRY HARRISON
Casual Gods
SIRE, 1988

His main band evaporating, Harrison delivered a second solo album throwing back to the proto new wave of *Fear Of Music*, albeit with a very '80s synthpop upswing. His debut's (understandable) messages of self-sufficiency and taking responsibility for one's own fate had given way to wry social commentary and intellectualised romances, making *Casual Gods* feel like a rediscovered addendum from Talking Heads' imperial age.
Highest chart position: UK – ; US 78

CASUAL GODS
Walk On Water
SIRE, 1990

The Casual Gods name stuck for Harrison's band, but the post-punk feel didn't; despite Adrian Belew's trademark guitar abrasions and some avant garde swerves, this third album took a straighter road through electro-soul, funk pop and laidback bar room rock. The politics were arguably more incisive than the sonics, notably on "I Cry For Iran".
Highest chart position: UK – ; US 188

SINGLES

"Things Fall Apart"
SIRE, 1981

The only single from *The Red And The Black* emulated the Heads' sophisticated new wave art-funk to tell the tale of a once-stable life in meltdown.
Highest chart position: UK – ; US –

"Rev It Up"
SIRE, 1987

Harrison's only solo US hit appears to be a straight-up motorbike/sex metaphor, until seeds of confusion are sown when his *"teethy she-wolf"* paramour starts *"steering with her knees"*.
Highest chart position: UK 90 ; US 7

"Man With A Gun"
SIRE, 1987

Harrison channelled Psychedelic Furs and The Cars for this elegant synthpop waft featured in steamy thriller *Two Moon Junction*.
Highest chart position: UK – ; US –

"Cherokee Chief"
SIRE, 1988

"Psycho Killer" if it had starred Jeremy Clarkson, this synthrock thumper portrays a dark-hearted *"night warrior"* cruising the night in a bulletproof 4x4.
Highest chart position: UK – ; US –

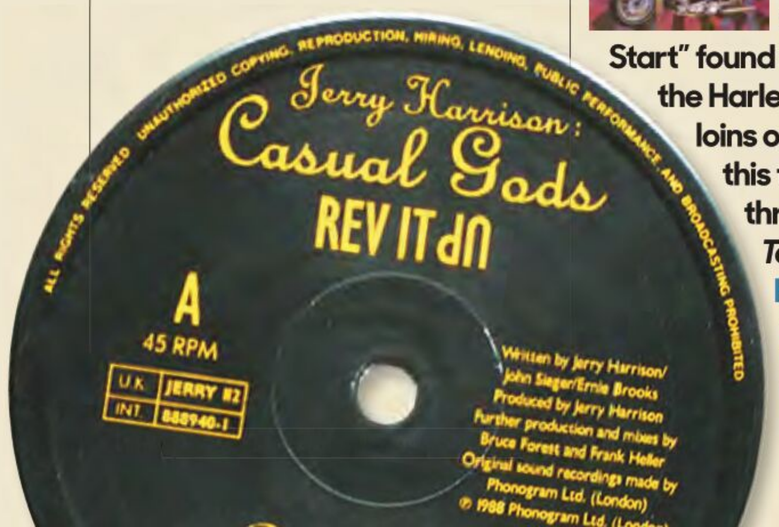
"Flying Under Radar"
SIRE, 1990

Potential lover as hi-grade military hardware. *"I'm a heat-seeking missile for you,"* Harrison warns over a slick roadhouse rock groove.
Highest chart position: UK – ; US –

"Kick Start"
SIRE, 1990

Something of a "Rev It Up" reprise, "Kick Start" found Harrison feeling the Harley thrum in his loins once more, albeit this time, vibe-wise, through more *Top Gun* trousers.
Highest chart position: UK – ; US –

MARK BEAUMONT



Talking Heads rock the execs at the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame show, 2002

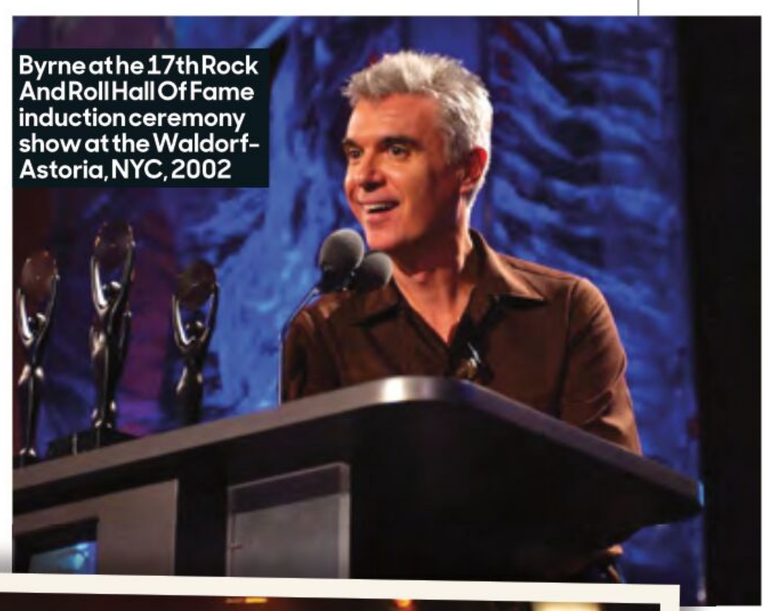
"THERE WERE A LOT OF OFFERS"

In 2002, Talking Heads were inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame. "It's hard to rock executives and their wives," says CHRIS FRANTZ. "But we did!"

CHRIS FRANTZ: "It was a little awkward at first but then everybody settled in and it was a very pleasant experience, It's not easy to rock a ballroom of music executives and their wives dressed up in tuxedos and evening gowns, but we did it. We had three songs to get them rocking and by the end of the third song we actually had a few people standing on tables. I can't speak for David but I was happy that he agreed to do it, we all were, and I'm sure he was happy I agreed to do it. My frame of mind was 'This is nice, say what you will about the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, whether it's important or worthwhile anymore, but when you get the call to say that your band is about to be inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, I can tell you that's a happy phone call.' I was just happy to be there and I said in my very short speech that 'I'd like to thank the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame for giving this band a happy ending.' Because it was a happy night and it had been 18 years since we played together. We were also very happy to be inducted on the same night as our good friends the Ramones, it was a big night for us, a big night for the Ramones, a big night for Sire. It was a very pleasant experience."

JERRY HARRISON: "The rehearsals went great, the playing went great, I think during the speeches, they were a little long-winded at times, there was a degree of discomfort. Everyone was a professional about it, we rehearsed for three days and we did the best show we could. I thought we were really good. The memory of it for me was playing 'Take Me To The River' and having – I think it's Sam who's still alive from Sam And Dave, come up and sing the background vocals in my microphone with Steve Cropper right next to me, it was like 'How did I ever get here?' There were a lot of offers [*to reform afterwards*] because the music business was in the audience and they saw that we still had the power to be able to be what we had been. Everyone got up and started dancing."

CHRIS FRANTZ: "We had hoped that it might kick something off again and we did get some very handsome offers to do concerts and tours and live DVDs, things like that. But it was just not to be." MARK BEAUMONT



Byrne at the 17th Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame induction ceremony show at the Waldorf-Astoria, NYC, 2002

Byrne and Sam Moore of Sam & Dave, 2002

KMAZUR/WIREIMAGE

LOOKS TOO OBSCURE TO ME

10 classic TALKING HEADS screen moments

"PSYCHO KILLER" from *Stop Making Sense*

As Byrne grooves along to his boombox, random drumbeats cause him to unravel. The unforgettable opening to the *Stop Making Sense* film.

TINA WEYMOUTH

"Heaven" in *Stop Making Sense* in particular. Introduces the musician to anyone who may have needed an introduction her unflappable cool and precision musicianship. The rock on which Talking Heads is built, and the barometer of its groove.

"ONCE IN A LIFETIME" promo, 1981

For the single release Byrne and choreographer Toni Basil worked on this raw classic. Primitive video editing is part of the timeless charm as Byrne jerkily inhabits the role of a salaryman on the verge of a breakdown.

"GENIUS OF LOVE"

"Introducing... the Tom Tom Club." Funky intermission during *Stop Making Sense*. Features an impressive "spider dance" by Tina Weymouth and a weirdly on-the-nose bit of direction where, as she sings the words *"my boyfriend"*, the camera cuts to Chris Frantz. Ahh, etc.

"GIRLFRIEND IS BETTER"

And while they were doing that, Byrne was getting changed into Big Suit. He only has it on for one-and-a-half songs but his first, slightly smirking, appearance within the padded grey ensemble is magnificent indeed.

From top: *Stop Making Sense*; *True Stories*; Frantz and Weymouth in the video for "Road To Nowhere"

TRUE STORIES FASHION SHOW

Visiting the mall in Virgil, Texas, Byrne and Louis (John Goodman) visit a fashion show which is part of the city's "celebration of specialness". One of the show's oddball fashion looks is introduced in typically idiosyncratic manner: "Be sexy in business. Be successful at night."

TRUE STORIES trailer

Compelling at ease as well as in motion, Byrne introduces (while wearing a 10-gallon hat) his film "about a bunch of people in Virgil, Texas".

"PAPA LEGBA"

Even without a guitar, Roebuck "Pops" Staples can stop a show. Preferred by many to the Talking Heads version on the *True Stories* album.

"ROAD TO NOWHERE"

Another primitive video classic. Byrne steals the show with his appearances as a hitchhiking swimmer and the "runner" character but Chris Frantz and Tina Weymouth are also a joy to behold as a couple raising a family and growing old in the space of about 10 seconds.

"BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE"

Byrne's *American Utopia* show – as befits a performance part *Stomp* part TED talk – is pretty compelling. Does it get better than the full-band, grey-suit dance marathon of this classic? Don't think it does. *JOHN ROBINSON*

FRANTZ AND WEYMOUTH ARE A JOY TO BEHOLD AS A COUPLE GROWING OLD IN THE SPACE OF 10 SECONDS

Byrne on the American Utopia tour at the Orpheum Theater, Minneapolis, May 17, 2018

THE KING IS GONE

In the absence of David Byrne, in 1996 "The Heads" deliver funky goth rock with a succession of guest vocalists. Even Black Grape show up. As does another kind of big suit

MANY is the jilted band that has tried to keep the gravy train on the tracks with a replacement singer and a slightly different name. To their credit, when Frantz, Weymouth and Harrison set about rebranding as The Heads in the wake of Byrne's surprise announcement that talking Heads were no more, they didn't simply rope in the artpop equivalent of Sammy Hagar. They reached out to a wide range of guest singers and lyricists, ranging from CBGB's buddies like Debbie Harry and Richard Hell to tour and studio associates such as Andy Partridge and Shaun Ryder, and even some major contemporary pop names – Michael Hutchence and Maria McKee would lend vocals to tracks on their sole album *No Talking, Just Head*.

The Heads were planned as an ongoing continuation act for the trio, until Byrne brought legal weight to bear on the project. The name and style of the band cleaved too close to the bone of the original, he claimed, and set about suing The Heads. An out-of-court settlement was reached which stymied the idea of further releases but did allow for the debut album to see the light of day. While Heads videos certainly played on the arthouse imagery of Talking Heads and new wave funk was in evidence throughout, they were at pains to distance themselves. Their collaborations with Concrete Blonde's Johnette Napolitano on "Damage I've Done" or Debbie Harry on the title track, for instance, were more akin to The Cure, Nine Inch Nails or Garbage than "Road To Nowhere"; even the McKee track, "No Big Bang", was crepuscular and industrial. Meanwhile, the likes of Hutchence, Partridge and Ryder – then of Black Grape – undoubtedly infected The Heads with their own bands' sonic signatures. A planned tour also went ahead, with Napolitano taking lead vocals on sets which bookended a large chunk of the Heads LP with some key Talking Heads songs. "Memories Can't Wait" and "Warning Sign" would open the shows and "Psycho Killer", "Burning Down The House" and "Life During Wartime" end the main set ahead of an encore of Harrison solo and Tom Tom Club favourites. A live album and video of the show, intended to feature the guest singers, was also scuppered however, and The Heads scattered once more. ▲ *MARK BEAUMONT*

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"I HAVE GREAT PRIDE IN THE BAND"

"Let's just play some music..." Jerry Harrison, 1977

The *TALKING HEADS* multi-instrumentalist on the journey from the Bowery to Nassau, and beyond. "One more idea and we'll have to go home..."

I GOT to know the band in 1976 when they passed through Cambridge, Massachusetts, where I was living and where the Modern Lovers had gotten together. They were aware of the Modern Lovers record. They gave me a call saying, "We're looking for a keyboard player," but it took me a long time to get down to New York because I was so completely broke – the Modern Lovers never really got our advance, we lived very humbly to put it mildly, sometimes moving a lightbulb from room to room.

I showed up with a guitar and they said, "But we're looking for a keyboard player," and I said, "Well, I couldn't fit it in the van, let's just play some music." So we went back to their loft on Christie Street and it just gelled from the very moment we started. I found their music completely unique and interesting, really unlike almost anything I'd heard before. David has this ability to totally let go, almost in the way that you do when you're screaming. He had really good pitch and he could have that sense of abandon without losing being musical with it. I knew that we would have great artistic importance but I had no idea how big an audience we could ever draw.

Harrison: "My role was to provide the glue that kept everything together"

They were on the regular circuit at CBGB's, which provided a wonderful nexus for all of the musicians to meet up. The bands got to keep the door and that meant that we could survive on playing CBGB's once a month for a weekend and a few other shows, and not have to be so dependent on a side job.

The first time we went to the Bahamas for *More Songs About Buildings And Food*, I flew to Nassau and said to the taxi driver, "Could you take me to Compass Point?" And he goes, "What's that?" "It's a recording studio." We arrive and there's a single streetlight. There are dogs barking and some chickens clucking. I get out and a door opens and it's Robert Palmer and he goes, "You must be in desperate need of a cocktail!" The rest was an absolutely glorious time. We'd get up and go swimming then go to the studio, it was quite magic. We were excited to be working with Eno, we felt a great mutual respect. He had two methodologies when you were stuck, one was to use those Oblique Strategies cards and if that didn't work, to smoke some pot. He'd say, "We're all gonna get one more idea then we'll have to go home."

We cut "I Zimbra" for *Fear Of Music* and we knew we wanted to do more of that and that was the blueprint for what we were doing next. We knew it was a gigantic departure from the punk music we had been associated with. We made this plan for *Remain In Light* that we were not going to really rehearse for the record and it would be created in the studio. We recognised that there were times that the first time you create a piece of music you play it differently than you ever did again. There was something wonderful about that and we wanted to see if we could capture it.

David and I sat in the studio as we were finishing *Remain In Light* and said, "To be able to play this live we'll need another guitar player, another keyboard player, on this one we'll need two basses." That big band was an experiment. There was a thrilling quality of being onstage with the band, it was an instant party within the audience.

BY the time we got to *Stop Making Sense* it was like a concept for the theatrical nature of the show, which was good and bad. In the beginning, where we had all the white lights on us, everyone could see what everybody was doing in the band at all times, you could see the shifting dynamic. I thought it was fantastic and a natural move to make but I thought we lost something as we gained something else. After *Stop Making Sense* David had a reluctance to tour again. We had so beautifully captured Talking Heads in that moment, would it be a let down next time we went on tour?

By *Naked* we had become a band that got together once in a while and made an album. When David announced the split, I thought it was saying, "This is the reality," so it wasn't shocking. I thought it was a bad business decision. I remember saying to David, "Talking Heads is in the enviable position where we called our own shots... the minute you end the Heads I guarantee you're gonna be put in a position of having to sell records and you're gonna suddenly be doing things that we'd say no to... we can keep this band together six to eight months out of two years, that's a long time for you to do anything else you're interested in. I think it's stupid." He just said, "I wanna go and do a bit on my own."

I think that we endure. David is a unique, brilliant person and it couldn't have happened without him, but the interplay – Chris's drumming is incredible, the way that Tina plays bass is different, her presence influenced everyone from Kim Gordon to D'Arcy in the Pumpkins. I felt my role was to provide the glue that supported and kept everything together. To many people we're amongst the most essential and influential bands that ever lived and I have great pride in it. ▲

PHOTOS: RICHARD E AARON/REDFERNS, LYNN GOLDSMITH/CORBIS/VCG VIA GETTY IMAGES. AS TOLD TO MARK BEAUMONT

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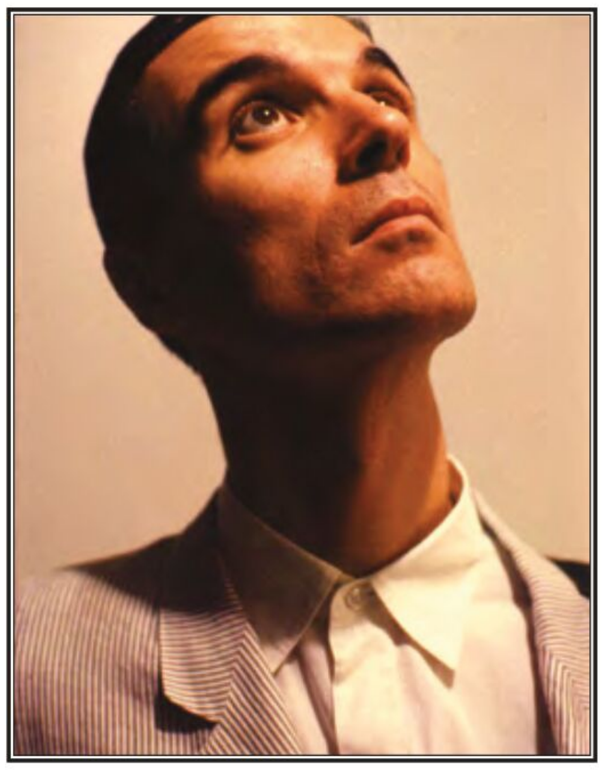
TALKING HEADS

Once in a lifetime… presenting the *Ultimate Music Guide* to the arty, unparalleled Talking Heads. From the nervy minimalism of their debut to the panglobal funk of *Stop Making Sense*, via solo records, the Tom Tom Club, suits large and small. As David Byrne writes in his exclusive foreword: "The chance to be disruptive and possibly revolutionary was an irresistible lure…"



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